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**THE DIOCESE OF COVENTRY AND
LICHFIELD,
1603-1642**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in the Department of
History at the University of Warwick.**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates religious life among the clergy and laity in the diocese of Lichfield, 1603-1642, including the role of Puritans, Catholics and Church Papists. Nicholas Tyacke has maintained that the implementation of Laudianism in Charles I's reign proved contentious, an interpretation criticised by some historians who aver that the Church continued to maintain a 'middle way'. This study finds that the evidence from the diocese largely supports Tyacke's interpretation.

Proto-Laudian reforms were implemented in the see some years before the Laudian ascendancy through the episcopates of Neile and Overall. Every bishop in the period who undertook a programme of reform met local hostility and indifference, and sometimes the opposition of his ecclesiastical and lay superiors.

Every religious group underwent change and development. Puritans and Catholics pursued strategies for survival, supported by their respective religious networks. Official opposition often had the effect of strengthening their resolve and confirming them in their beliefs. Local conformists' commitment to the established Church deepened during this period. They respected the Church's role as the official purveyor of religion, morality and the ecclesiastical rites of passage, without evidencing much theological understanding.

In the 1630s Bishop Wright oversaw the Laudian programme of sacramental, sacerdotal and liturgical reform, but his lack of organisation, zeal and commitment frustrated Charles, Laud and some local diocesan officials. The changes met resistance, which gathered strength with the collapse of the Personal Rule and manifested itself either in a desire to return to the pre-Laudian Church, or in its root and branch reform. The strength of an individual's anti-Catholicism indicated which religious solution s/he supported. When war came, for the most part Puritans predictably supported Parliament, but a number of moderate Puritans supported the King. Even among the 'godly' fraternity allegiance could sometimes be determined by a variety of considerations.

ABBREVIATIONS

B	Bodleian Library
<i>CHS</i>	<i>Collections for a History of Staffordshire</i>
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
DRO	Derbyshire Record Office
<i>HMC</i>	<i>Historical Manuscripts Commission</i>
LJRO	Lichfield Joint Record Office
<i>SCH</i>	<i>Staffordshire Catholic History</i>
SHRO	Shropshire Record Office
SRO	Staffordshire Record Office
<i>TSAS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society</i>
<i>VCH</i>	<i>Victoria County History</i>
WRO	Warwickshire Record Office
WSL	William Salt Library, Stafford

The year is taken to commence on 1 January

Introduction

This thesis examines the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield during the forty years that preceded the Civil War, a period of both cohesion and division. It will investigate the consolidation of the established Church in a region where Protestantism faced many difficulties, including a conservative population and an impoverished ecclesiastical institution. The diocese, lying in a region relatively neglected by ecclesiastical historians, contained a set of distinctive characteristics which throw new light on the current debates about the early Stuart Church. Many of the recent hypotheses and generalisations have been offered from a national perspective, and this thesis sets out to test them from a local viewpoint. It will examine the local impact of developments such as Laudianism, and explore the fortunes of the Puritan and Catholic minorities. In Coventry and Lichfield, Puritanism was weak and Catholicism comparatively strong, and none of the 'competing' religious interests, including the established church, could feel secure.

By 1603 the liturgy which had been introduced in 1559 was widely accepted, and few could remember the old Catholic rites. However the deep divisions within the Elizabethan Church, with traditionalists and crypto-Catholics facing Puritan reformers, were far from settled. Both Puritans and Catholics hoped for better times with the accession of James I in 1603, and both were disappointed, for James wanted to consolidate, rather than transform, the Elizabethan Church. Numerous strands can be identified within the early Stuart Church, which may be labelled as the Puritans, Prayer Book Anglicans, Parish Anglicans, Church Papists, the indifferent, the openly ungodly and, by Charles's reign, the Laudians. Outside the Church were Recusants, the vast majority of whom were Catholics who refused to participate in Protestant worship. All were

uneasy about some of the emphases within the established church, and the character of most of these groups underwent some mutation in the early seventeenth century. Probably every historian would agree with Anthony Milton that 'all patterns of thought, all groupings within the English Church were undergoing change and development during this period'.¹

Methodology and Sources

The methodological approach is partly chronological, partly thematic. The thesis sets out to explore the impact of successive bishops and their officers in their attempts to foster Protestant devotion and confront the problems of Puritanism, Catholicism, Church-Papism, ignorance and indifference. It uses ecclesiastical court records to investigate the impact of these policies, and, where possible, to ascertain the responses of Puritans and other groups to their situation. The thesis makes use of a wide variety of sources, including printed religious literature. The majority of this material is Puritan, published for a nationwide popular market, and written by a minority within a minority.² It also utilises letters, commonplace books and sermon-notes. In the word-based culture of the godly, this material also favours Puritans. Even where this is not the case, it privileges the religious experience and preoccupations of a literate elite, in the main clerics, and the nobility and gentry. Evidence of popular religiosity is almost non-existent, although it can sometimes be glimpsed in church court records and in direct and indirect references in contemporary printed material. Even the petitions of the early 1640s, in favour of a Protestant pre-Laudian Church or the Root and Branch Bill, give only limited evidence of popular participation, these texts being derived from extra-diocesan sources and/or written by members of the elite.

The study also draws on a variety of ecclesiastical sources, especially church court records. Bishops' visitation articles, another source, were often patterned on

¹ A Milton, *Catholic and Reformed* (Cambridge, 1995), p.543.

² J.Spurr, *English Puritanism* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp.190-192.

earlier sets, but Fincham has shown that they could nevertheless contain clear indications of personal episcopal preoccupations.³ The churchwardens' responses to these articles, the *comperta*, provide invaluable evidence about discipline within the diocese, and have been used to investigate the character and distribution of non-conformity. However, the value of these sources is dependent on the conscientiousness and reliability of these seventeenth century parish officers. Their reports were not always accurate, and omissions mean that their picture of parish life was probably far more conformist than was really the case. Moreover, the purpose of the *comperta* was to record various aspects of ungodliness or non-conformity, and the religious voice of the law-abiding majority is therefore silent in these records. They tell us only about the extraordinary, the principled, the godless, and the unstable. It is also important to note that many sets of *comperta* for 1603-1642 are incomplete. Some are missing altogether, with none extant before 1609 or after 1639, significant omissions whose survival would have taught us much about the effectiveness of Bishop William Overton's policy, and the later collapse of episcopal discipline in the early 1640s. Even amongst the *comperta* that remain, some have suffered serious deterioration, or are fragments of what were much longer documents. Comparisons are problematic because 1614, 1620, 1636 and 1639 are the only years in which such information is extant for all the archdeaconries.⁴

There are other *lacunae*. The only surviving bishop's register from the period is that of Thomas Morton (1619-1632). There is a dearth of material relating to the dean and chapter, and their peculiars. The bishops and the cathedral clergy were often at loggerheads during this period, so this deficiency is particularly unfortunate. Similar problems occur in gauging the effectiveness of godly reformation in Wolverhampton where, unlike Coventry, local government was the responsibility of three manorial courts and the Easter vestry, and no manuscript

³ K.Fincham, (ed.), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church* (Woodbridge, 1994), vol.1, pp.xvii-xxii.

⁴ See Appendix, pp.340-344.

evidence has survived. We must glean what we can from other sources— which, by their nature, deal with Puritanism's religious rather than social dimensions.

Documentary survival is patchy, and some issues and personalities are therefore covered in greater detail than others. The Arminian controversy of the 1630s generated a considerable literature, which enables a more nuanced study than is possible for the period 1603-1619. Amongst the bishops, documentation on Overton, Morton and Wright is comparatively plentiful, but little has survived from the episcopate of John Overall (1614-1618). While there is a considerable body of material on non-conforming Puritanism, conforming Puritanism, by its nature, is less well represented. It is difficult, therefore, to estimate the extent of clerical Puritanism in 1603, and only a little simpler in 1642. The thesis will argue that there was a moderate increase in the Puritan constituency over this period, but it is not possible to give any reliable figures. Moreover, dramatic changes in churchwardens' presentments probably tell us more about the unreliability of the local officers, or the zeal of an archdeacon, than any conspicuous alteration in behaviour. On the other hand, the striking alterations in recusant returns over the period may bear witness to the ability of this community to semi-conform during periods of persecution; such fluctuations are more indicative of an accepted survival strategy than of laxity on the part of local church officers.

The Historiographical Framework

The final four chapters of this thesis deal with the implementation of Laudianism in the diocese, and the reaction it caused. Was this as destabilising locally as Nicholas Tyacke claims it was nationally? He has argued that for about sixty years before the mid-1620s there was a consensus between most of the educated clergy and the majority of educated laymen within the Church, based on a Calvinist faith in absolute and double predestination. This common ground blunted the sharp differences on ecclesiology and liturgy, and acted as a stabiliser to the Church. This stability was threatened by the emergence and growth of the

Arminian party within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which held power during the reign of Charles I.⁵ The Arminians sought to break up and destroy Calvinist pre-eminence, introducing radical reforms, whose implementation was to provoke a violent reaction in the 1640s.

Tyacke's interpretation, largely shared by Patrick Collinson, has been disputed by G.W. Bernard, Kevin Sharpe and Peter White. They argue that the established Church adopted and maintained a 'middle way'.⁶ Sharpe holds that, during the 1630s, the level of contention was low, and that Laud could be classified as a moderate in his government of the Church, being subservient to the King, an argument also made by Julian Davies in *The Caroline Captivity of the Church*.⁷ The concern of these authors is with the national picture. What, however, was the situation in individual dioceses? Was there a perceptible change in ecclesiastical policy at diocesan level in the 1630s, and, if so, what effect did it have and what resistance did it provoke? Writing of the church in the 1630s, Andrew Foster has commented that comparatively little has been written about Laudianism at the local level, and that the debate on the subject can only be resolved through regional studies.⁸ There have already been some diocesan studies of this period; this is an addition to the number, providing a new perspective, from a diocese with a different set of religious characteristics.⁹

⁵ N.Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution', in C.Russell, (ed.), *Origins of the English Civil War* (London, 1973) pp. 119-143; *idem*, *Anti-Calvinists: the Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford, 1987).

⁶ G.W.Bernard, 'The Church of England, c.1529-c.1642', *History*, 75 (1990), pp.183-206; P.White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic* (Cambridge,1992); K.Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (Yale,1993).

⁷ J.Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church* (Oxford, 1992). See also Tyacke's answer to his critics in Tyacke, 'Anglican attitudes: some recent writings on English history, from the Reformation to the Civil War', *Journal of British Studies*, xxxv (1996), pp.139-67.

⁸ A. Foster, 'Church Policies of the 1630's', in R. Cust and A. Hughes (eds.), *Conflict in the Early Stuart Church* (Harlow, 1989), pp. 193-223.

⁹ See, for instance: A.J. Fletcher, *A County Community at Peace and War: Sussex 1600-1660* (London, 1975); M. Tillbrook, 'Arminianism and County Society in County Durham, 1617-1642' in D. Marcombe (ed.), *The Last Principality* (Nottingham, 1987); J.Fielding, 'Arminianism in the Localities: Peterborough Diocese 1603-1642', in K.Fincham (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church* (Basingstoke, 1993), pp.93-114; M Stieg, *Laud's Laboratory: the Diocese of Bath and Wells in the Early Seventeenth Century* (East Brunswick, 1982). County studies of particular relevance are: A. Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge, 1987); D. Oldridge, 'Conflict within the Established Church in Warwickshire' (PhD thesis, University of

Some of the issues raised in assessing the local impact of Laudianism are equally relevant to this study as a whole. One is the relationship between the ecclesiastical policies at national level and the stance of the local bishop. James I attempted to construct a broad Church, within which advancement was open to clerics across a range of opinion.¹⁰ The diocesan bishops, men of different views, were responsible for the implementation of whatever policies were currently favoured at national level, which could raise a number of problems. If a bishop was out of sympathy with a new policy, how far would he feel obliged to further it? If he was in sympathy, how far might he still be hindered by resistance among the diocesan clergy, churchwardens, the gentry and town corporations? To make a real impact a bishop needed to have a strong and committed team of deputies, such as Launcelot Andrewes, for example, created. How far were the bishops of Coventry and Lichfield able to establish such a team?

Early Stuart bishops were the targets of much censure by their contemporaries, and fared little better from some later historians. Hugh Trevor-Roper described the Jacobean bench as 'indifferent, negligent and secular'. In *The Religion of Protestants*, Patrick Collinson argued that the majority were Calvinist in doctrine and zealous in the performance of their duties. He sees most as being eager for reconciliation with Puritans, rather than for persecution. Fincham's research has reinforced this view, and has shown the impressive measure of pastoral work undertaken by bishops at Court and in the dioceses.¹¹ Fincham argues, however, that the model preaching prelate of James's reign was replaced during the Laudian ascendancy by bishops committed to the maintenance of

Warwick, 1992); L. Beats, 'Politics and Government in Derbyshire, 1640-1660' (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1978); M.D.G. Wanklyn, 'Landed Society and Allegiance in Cheshire and Shropshire in the First Civil War' (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1976); J.T. Pickles, 'Studies in Royalism in the English Civil War, 1642-1646, with special reference to Staffordshire' (M.A. thesis, University of Manchester, 1968); R. Clark, 'Anglicanism, Recusancy and Dissent in Derbyshire, 1603-1730' (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1979).

¹⁰ K. Fincham and P. Lake, 'The Ecclesiastical Policies of James I and Charles I', in Fincham (ed.), *Early Stuart Church*, pp. 23-50.

¹¹ H. Trevor-Roper, 'James I and his Bishops', in *Historical Essays* (London, 1957), pp. 130-145; P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 81-84; K. Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor* (Oxford, 1990).

obedience and uniformity within their sees.¹² One of the aims of this study is to see how the priorities of the bishops of Coventry and Lichfield correspond to the pattern suggested by Fincham. It will also ask whether the binary 'pastoral/disciplinary' model, which mimics the prevailing Stuart mind-set of 'addressing every proposition ... in terms of its ... antithesis', is insufficiently flexible and nuanced to give a balanced picture of the bishops of the period.¹³

Every bishop faced the problem of how to reconcile uneasy clerical consciences to the requirements of the established Church. In comparison with a county such as Essex, Puritanism was weak in Coventry and Lichfield, yet even here there was no single 'Puritan' position, but rather a spectrum of attitudes reflecting individual beliefs, personalities, and circumstances. What was the state of the evangelical reformation within the diocese? The thesis will examine the character of the Puritan movement, exploring the tactics the Puritans adopted to survive in an unfriendly local environment, and how their situation altered in the 1630s, with the hierarchy's new insistence on a redefined ceremonial conformity. How far can we detect the local impact of the Laudian regime in terms of an increase in prosecutions for non-conformity, or changing patterns of behaviour by the beleaguered Puritan minority?¹⁴

Evidence of the social aspirations of Puritanism can be found in a number of towns which sought to promote a godly community, similar to that of Calvin's Geneva, such as Norwich, Dorchester and Doncaster.¹⁵ Several towns within the diocese saw similar attempts to establish a godly reformation. Shrewsbury has been described as initially a 'Protestant town with touches of Puritanism', and in

¹² Fincham, 'Episcopal Government, 1603-1640', in *Early Stuart Church*, pp.71-92.

¹³ P.Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Basingstoke, 1988), p.147.

¹⁴ K.Fincham, 'Clerical conformity from Whitgift to Laud', in P.Lake and M.Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c.1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp.125-158; P. Collinson, *The Puritan Character* (Los Angeles, 1989), p.8; *idem*, 'A Comment: Concerning the Name Puritan', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31 (1980), pp. 483-8; Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, p.543.

¹⁵ Collinson, *Birthpangs of Protestant England*, p.43; D. Underdown, *Fire From Heaven* (London, 1992); C.Cross, 'Religion in Doncaster from the Reformation to the Civil War', in P.Collinson and J.Craig (eds.), *The Reformation in English Towns* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp.48-62.

the late sixteenth century saw John Tomkys, the Bilston Puritan, as town lecturer attempting a civic spiritual renewal, but ultimately proved resistant to such efforts.¹⁶ Coventry, the scene of much Puritan activity from the start of Elizabeth's reign, was described as a 'second Geneva' by Richard Montagu, its Puritan Corporation also embracing social reform. Its story is familiar through the work of Ann Hughes, Darren Oldridge and others. This thesis takes Wolverhampton as its case study.¹⁷ Wolverhampton was a less promising prospect for Puritan reformation and its religious history has been little explored. Despite little in the way of a reformed tradition in the early 1620s, the newly appointed preacher, Richard Lee, set out to build a strong Puritan community. The thesis will ask how Lee set about his task, what allies he found, and how much he achieved.

The see remained far more promising territory for Catholics, and contained a sizeable recusant presence. John Bossy sees recusants as usually gathered around the homes of the Catholic gentry, and the thesis will explore whether such a model adequately characterises the diocesan Catholic community. Christopher Haigh is deeply critical of the seigneurial base of Catholicism, viewing it as essentially selfish in character.¹⁸ Rather than providing the shelter from which priests could launch a Catholic renaissance, he argues that the gentry monopolised the attentions of priests who would have been more profitably employed meeting the needs of poor Catholics throughout the country. By the 1630s, the Catholic Church 'had become a tiny introspective group, its missionaries unable to sustain and strengthen existing Catholic loyalties, some areas and some social groups

¹⁶ P.Collinson, 'The Shearmen's Tree and the Preacher: the Strange Death of Merry England in Shrewsbury and Beyond' in Collinson and Craig, *Reformation in English Towns*, pp.205-220.

¹⁷ Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, *passim*; *idem*, 'Coventry and the English Revolution', in R.C.Richardson (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the English Revolution* (Manchester, 1992), pp.69-99; Oldridge, 'Conflict in Warwickshire', *passim*; B. Coulton, 'Implementing the reformation in the Urban Community: Coventry and Shrewsbury 1559-1603', *Midland History*, xxv (2000), pp.43-60.

¹⁸ M.A.Mullett, *Catholics in Britain and Ireland, 1588-1829* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp.2-7; J.Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, 1975); C.Haigh, 'From Monopoly to Minority: Catholicism in Early Modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th. Series, xxxi (1981), pp.129-148.

being virtually lost to the faith'.¹⁹ How well does Haigh's picture match with what we can discern of Catholicism's size and vitality within the diocese?

The largest but most problematic religious grouping comprised the 'silent majority' of conformists. Historians have argued over the extent of their commitment to the liturgy and doctrines of the established Church, and what their conformity signifies. Christopher Haigh speaks of 'Parish Anglicans', who had continued to attend church after the settlement of 1559, but were reluctant to surrender their Catholicism and remained subconsciously attached to its practices and beliefs. Their allegiance to the 'Old Faith' gradually diminished over the years. Impervious to reformed religion, they came to centre their worship on the rites and ceremonies prescribed by the Prayer Book. Haigh suggests that such worshippers formed the bedrock of the parochial acceptance of Laudian reforms.²⁰ Judith Maltby disputes this interpretation. She argues that these 'spiritual leftovers', instead of forming a natural constituency for Laudianism, helped to provide opposition to its innovations. She prefers to speak of 'Prayer Book Anglicans', parishioners who were attached to services which were 'according to the Prayer Book', but who had also imbibed its basic theology through regular attendance at worship. Persuaded of the Protestant nature of the Church, they were a significant body, demanding that their worship be regulated by the vernacular reformed liturgy. Their voice was heard unequivocally in the petitions to Parliament of 1640-2, which requested the retention of the Prayer Book and a return to pre-Laudian episcopalianism.²¹ Haigh and Maltby interpret the religiosity of the conforming majority in very different ways. As Peter Marshall

¹⁹ C. Haigh, 'The Continuity of Catholicism in the English Reformation', *Past and Present*, 93 (1981), pp.37-69; *idem*, 'Revisionism, the Reformation and the History of English Catholicism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36 (1985), pp.394-406.

²⁰ C. Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics and the People', in Haigh (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Basingstoke, 1984), pp.195-219.

²¹ J. Maltby, '“By this Book”, Parishioners, the Prayer Book and the Established Church', in Fincham (ed.), *Early Stuart Church*, pp.115-138; Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998).

has commented, such attitudes of mind leave few traces in the historical record.²² What light can a diocesan study throw on this controversy, and how far do the sources available enable us to glimpse the views of Prayer Book or Parish Anglicans?²³

The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis focuses on the ecclesiastical history of a poor and relatively neglected diocese in a period of change. It concentrates on religious matters, and says relatively little on administration or finance. These issues, and that of patronage have been addressed by Rosemary O'Day.²⁴ The pursuit of private suits in the church courts and the moral discipline of the laity also lie outside the scope of this study. The findings of the thesis are placed within the context of the early Stuart church as a whole, comparing like with like. For example, the character of local Puritanism is briefly contrasted with that prevailing in parts of Chester diocese, and the effectiveness of Bishop Wright (1632-1643) is measured against some of his Arminian episcopal peers, rather than his immediate predecessor at Lichfield, the Calvinist Thomas Morton.

The structure of the work is as follows:

Chapter One outlines the churchmanship and leadership of William Overton, elevated to the episcopate in 1580.

Chapter Two deals with the episcopates of his successors, George Abbot, Richard Neile, John Overall and Thomas Morton, discusses their churchmanship and its implementation, and explores how far their policies corresponded with those promulgated by the King and the Archbishop. It also profiles their careers to

²² P.Marshall (ed.), *The Impact of the English Reformation, 1500-1640* (London, 1997), pp.232-233.

²³ A. Walsham, 'The Parochial Roots of Laudianism revisited: Catholics, anti-Calvinists and "Parish Anglicans" in Early Stuart England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 49 (1998), pp.620-651.

²⁴ M.R. O'Day, *The English Clergy* (Leicester, 1979); *idem*, 'Clerical patronage and Recruitment in England in the Elizabethan and Early Stuart Periods' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1972); *idem*, 'Cumulative Debt: the Bishops of Coventry and Lichfield and their economic problems, c. 1540-1640', *Midland History*, iii (1975-1976), pp.77-93.

examine Fincham's pastoral/disciplinary categorisation of the episcopate as a whole.

The third chapter examines Puritan influence, both clerical and lay. It assesses the lives of a number of Puritan clergy, categorises Puritan publications and seeks evidence of ministerial networks. The section on the laity looks at the gentry, their tendency to marry 'in the Lord', their roles as patrons and magistrates, and their spirituality. Despite the paucity of sources, the evidence shows there was also some support for Puritan beliefs and practices among the middling and lower sorts within the diocese. The chapter concludes that the Puritan community, in spite of Laudian disapproval and harassment, grew modestly in size and stronger in its convictions during this period.

The fourth chapter looks at the Catholic community, both recusant and semi-conforming. It shows that Catholicism can be found amongst all social classes, with the gentry clearly dominant. *Comperta*, recusancy returns and parish registers are studied to give an indication of the strength of recusancy and its geographical distribution, and for evidence of Catholic attitudes to the 'rites of passage'. These documents also reveal the continuing existence of church papists, and their uneasy relationship with the established church.

Bishop Robert Wright is the subject of the fifth chapter, which looks at his ecclesiology and its implementation. During his episcopate, 1632-1643, there was an attempt to impose a more rigorous conformity and to enforce the railing of altars in response to the metropolitan order of 1634. The evidence suggests, however, that his support for the Laudian reforms was somewhat luke-warm when his episcopal record is compared with those of his more zealous peers.

The sacramental and conformist emphases of Laudianism were antithetical to Puritan religion. Chapter six offers a local case study, describing an attempt to bring Puritanism to Wolverhampton in the 1620s, and the official disapproval this provoked a decade later. It shows how unpopular the Laudian

reforms were amongst painful religionists in the area, and the level of local resistance to them.

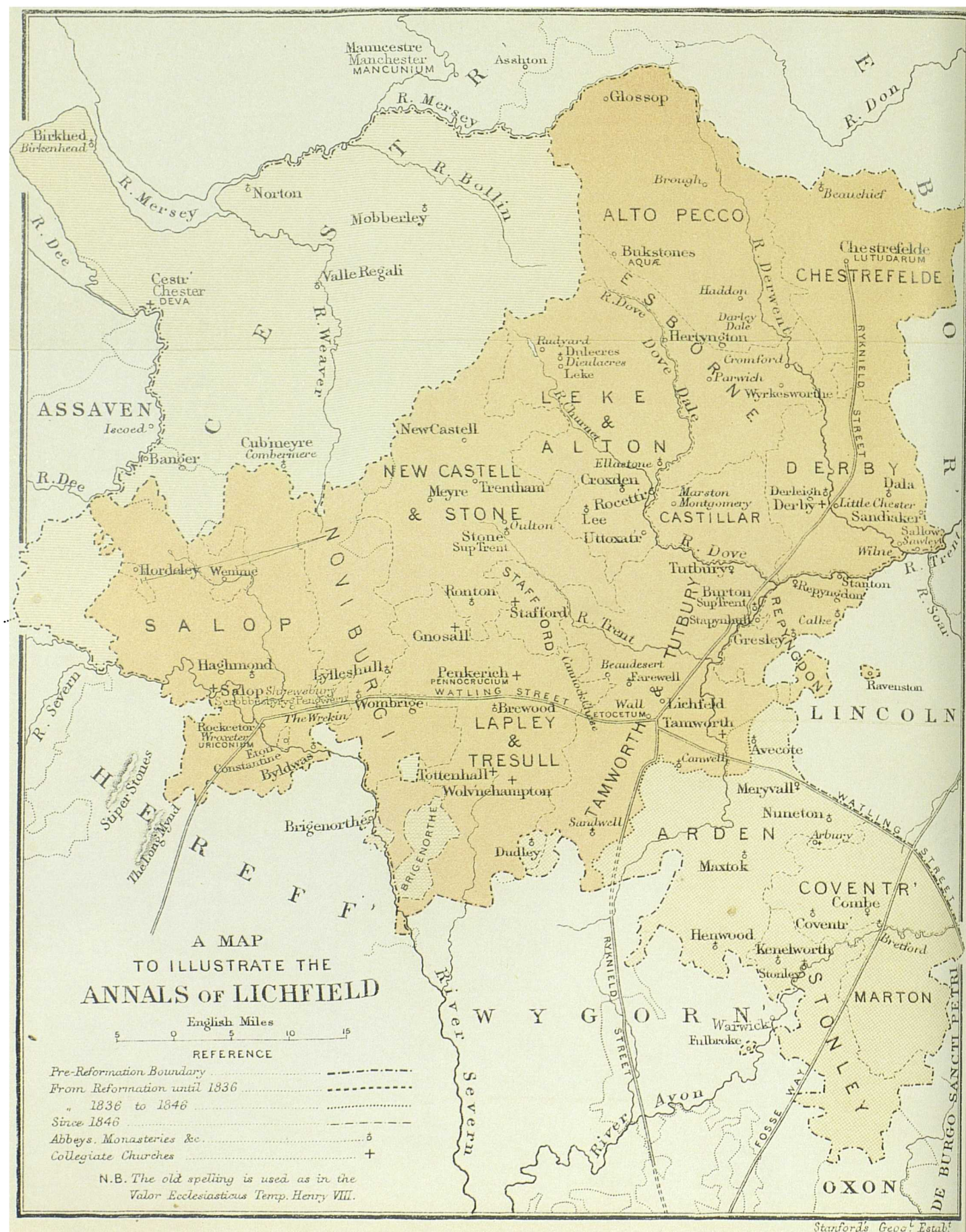
Chapter seven examines the evidence for clerical and lay Arminian support. It finds a group of diocesan officials, local clergy, and some layfolk who espoused a more sacramental religion, and who, though pursuing very different goals from the Puritans, manifested a similar crusading spirit. The chapter also looks at the issue of conformity and Prayer Book Protestantism, and asks what can be found about the faith and attitudes of the conforming masses. It places this discussion in the context of the recent debates between Collinson, Haigh and Maltby and explores the problems associated with all attempts to use church records to elucidate sophisticated religious distinctions.

The period 1640-1642 saw the rapid collapse of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the initiative for religious reform passing to Parliament. Chapter eight surveys the collapse of Laudianism within the diocese, and analyses religious persuasion as a determining factor of political affiliation, the ecclesiastical means used to influence the political stance of laymen, and the importance of religion as a factor in the taking up of arms.

The Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield and its Ecclesiastical Organisation

The Henrician reforms of 1541 significantly altered the boundaries of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield for the first time in 600 years, when the old archdeaconry of Chester was united with the archdeaconry of Richmond to create the new diocese of Chester.²⁵ The area which remained was ruled from the bishop's seat in Lichfield and consisted of the archdeaconries of Stafford (almost co-terminous with the county), and Derby (co-terminous with the county boundary), with the two other archdeaconries of Coventry (covering the northern and eastern hundreds of Warwickshire) and Salop (which included Shropshire north of the Severn, as well as the majority of the parishes in the hundred of

²⁵ *Victoria County History, Staffordshire*, vol. 3, p.44.



Conover, south of the river.²⁶ Over ten per cent of all the parishes within the diocesan boundaries were peculiars: benefices whose ordinary was not the bishop, and which were consequently not under his immediate jurisdiction.²⁷ Despite the Henrician reforms, Coventry and Lichfield remained one of the larger English sees, covering a greater area, for instance, than the neighbouring dioceses of Worcester or Hereford, Peterborough or Oxford. Including two counties and with substantial portions of two others, the diocese contained a diversity of terrain, and a population involved in several types of farming and a variety of other occupations, including lead-mining in Derbyshire.²⁸ From 'time out of mind' the ecclesiastical structure of parish, deanery, archdeaconry and diocese had been superimposed on the region. With the coming of Reformation in the sixteenth century, the church hierarchy also sought to implement change, channelling an attempt to transform the spiritual lives of the people committed to its charge through the existing diocesan organisation and structure.²⁹

Each of the four archdeaconries, Coventry, Derby, Stafford and Salop, possessed pensions, procurations and synodals, but they enjoyed no other

²⁶ The archdeaconry of Salop excluded the parishes in the hinterland of Oswestry, which were under the jurisdiction of St. Asaph. For each of the archdeaconries, see the county maps in C.R.Humphery-Smith, *The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers*, (Chichester, 1995), maps pp. 8, 29, 31, 35. See opposite page for diocesan map found in W.Beresford, *Diocesan Histories, Lichfield*, (London, 1888).

²⁷ 'A peculiar is a parish church or district exempt from the jurisdiction of the ordinary or bishop of the diocese and subject to the jurisdiction of one who is virtually its own ordinary. The nature of a peculiar is very much varied'. J.S.Purvis, *A Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Terms*, (London, 1962).

²⁸ For a geographic, agricultural and industrial overview of the diocese, see, for example: J. Thirsk, 'The Farming Regions of England', in *idem* (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1500-1640* (Cambridge, 1967), vol. iv, pp. 99-112, 245; *idem*, *England's Agricultural Regions and Agricultural History, 1500-1700* (Basingstoke, 1987); *VCH, Staffs.*, vol.1, *passim*, vol.2, p.239; *VCH, Derbyshire*, vol.1, *passim*, vol.2, pp.308,358-9; *VCH, Warwickshire*, vol.1, *passim*, vol.8, p.316; A.Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire* (Cambridge,1987), chapter 1; V.Skipp, 'Economic and Social Change in the Forest of Arden, 1530-1649', in Thirsk (ed.), *Land, Church and People* (Reading, 1970), pp.84-111; Thirsk, 'Agriculture and Social Change', in *idem* (ed.), *Land, Church and People*, pp.148-177; *VCH, Shropshire*, vol.1, *passim*; P.Edwards, 'The Development of Dairy Farming on the North Shropshire Plain,' *Midland History*, 4 (1978), pp. 175-190.

²⁹ P.Collinson, 'Episcopacy and Reform in the Late Sixteenth Century', in G.J.Cumming (ed.), *Studies in Church History*, vol.iii (Leiden, 1966), pp. 91-125. According to Professor Collinson, the administrative structure was largely that of the late Middle Ages. The procedure in church courts and at visitations still implied a view of pastoral care that was primarily jurisdictional.

endowments.³⁰ The archdeaconry of Coventry comprised the four deaneries of Coventry, Arden, Marten and Stoneley, being rated at £45 9s. for first fruits.³¹ William James was archdeacon from 1577 to 1584; he was later elevated to Durham. On his resignation from Coventry, William Hinton became archdeacon, holding office until his death in 1631.³²

The archdeaconry of Stafford contained the four deaneries of Lapley and Trysull, Leek and Alston, Newcastle and Stone, and Tamworth and Tutbury. It was rated for first fruits at £30 16s. 10d. Thomas Bickley succeeded to the office of archdeacon in 1567. A preacher of reformed doctrine, he had lived in France in the time of Mary, returning to England after Elizabeth's accession. Made warden of Merton College, Oxford, in 1569, he was elevated to the see of Chichester in 1585.³³ In 1586, he was succeeded by Humphry Tindall.³⁴ Derby archdeaconry consisted of the six deaneries of Derby, Castillar, Chesterfield, Ashbourne, High Peak, and Repton, being valued for first fruits at £26 13s. 4d. John Walton held the position from 1590 until his death in 1603.³⁵ The archdeaconry of Salop was valued for first fruits at £19, and contained the deaneries of Salop and Newport. The rector of Stockton (Shropshire), Godfrey Goldsborough, was made

³⁰ Pension. 'A regular sum granted and fixed by an ecclesiastical authority, usually a bishop, to be taken from the revenues of a church to the support of a previous incumbent or other person. Procuration. A contribution...paid by incumbents to an ordinary in visitation, as an equivalent for providing him and his train with hospitality during the visitation'. defns. from Purvis, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Terms*.

Synodal. A payment made by the inferior clergy to the bishop, properly on the occasion of a synod, and hence at an episcopal or archidiaconal visitation. *Oxford English Dictionary*

³¹ First Fruits. The profits of an incumbency or spiritual living for the first year after a vacancy and new appointment, paid to the crown. Information in this section is largely taken from, Browne Willis, *A Survey of the Cathedrals of York, Durham, Carlisle, Chester, Man, Lichfield, Hereford, Worcester, Gloucester and Bristol* (London, 1727).

³² Archdeacons duties include general disciplinary supervision of the clergy, and more particular care over the temporal administration of ecclesiastical property. They usually induct parish priests to new benefices and admit churchwardens to their offices. They conduct yearly visitations. F.L.Cross and E.A.Livinstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Church* (London,1974), 2nd edition; J.S.Purvis, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Terms*.

³³ *DNB*.

³⁴ Tindall died in 1614. He was also dean of Ely and Master of Queen's College, Cambridge.

³⁵ Walton was buried at All Saints, Derby. The Latin inscription on his tomb mentions his archdiaconate, his prebendal stall (for Wellington) at Lichfield Cathedral, and that he was rector of Breadsall and Gedling (Browne Willis).

archdeacon in the 1580s, becoming Bishop of Gloucester in 1598. His successor, Roger Dod, was elevated to the bishopric of Meath in 1607.

Heylin maintained that the total amount of the clergy's tenths for the diocese was £590. 16s. 11d, and that the see contained 557 parishes.³⁶ Browne Willis, writing in 1727, estimated there were 'in my account no less than 643'; his larger figure reflects his decision to count peculiar jurisdictions, perpetual curacies and chapels as parishes.

At Lichfield the members of the cathedral chapter were headed by the dean, precentor, chancellor and treasurer. All these offices had prebends annexed to them.³⁷ There were twenty-seven other prebendal stalls. The dean and four others, chosen from among the prebendaries, were known as 'canons residentiary'. Unlike some cathedrals, the archdeacons, unless they were also prebendaries, had no stalls at Lichfield.

George Boleyn was dean from 1576 to 1602, also holding prebends at Canterbury and Chichester. Possibly the natural son of George Boleyn, Viscount Rochford, he was preferred to a canonry at Canterbury in 1566. At the metropolitan visitation of 1573 charges of violence against members of the cathedral chapter were brought against him, which included striking a canon on the ear, thrashing a lawyer, and threatening to nail the dean to the wall.³⁸ In 1575 he was presented to the rectory of St. Dionis Backchurch, London, by the dean and chapter at Canterbury, and, having become a D.D. as a member of Trinity College, Cambridge, was installed as dean at Lichfield in 1576. He died in 1602. James Montague (later bishop of Bath and Wells and then of Winchester) was

³⁶ From 1559 first fruits and tenths were payable on vicarages worth £10 or more in the Valor Ecclesiasticus, and on rectories of £6 13s 4d upwards. C.Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church* (Oxford, 1955), p.189.

³⁷ A dean is head of a cathedral, *primus inter pares* amongst the canons. President of the chapter, he controls the services, administration and fabric of the cathedral, largely independent of the bishop, to whom he is next in rank. Purvis, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Terms*.

A precentor is responsible for the control and conduct of the choir services. 'in cathedrals of the old foundation he ranks next to the dean'. *Ibid*.

The treasurer was responsible for guarding the cathedral treasures, i.e. its plate and vestments. Stamford E. Lehmberg, *The Reformation of Cathedrals* (Princeton, 1988), pp.6-7.

³⁸ *DNB*.

made dean in 1603, being succeeded by William Tooker, a prebendary at Salisbury, in 1604.

Precentors in the Cathedral during this period were Edward Leeds (1560-1588), who, according to Willis, had been a monk, and was afterwards prebendary at Ely and rector at Croxton, and Zachary Babington. Babington held the post from 1589 until his death in 1608. Richard Barbour, LL.D., the archdeacon of Leicester, and the rector of Yoxall (Staffs) was treasurer from 1574 to 1589. He was succeeded by John Hudson and later, in the same year, by William Barlow. Barlow, who was later archdeacon of Salisbury, held the position until his death in 1625.³⁹

According to Browne Willis, the Chancellor of the diocese from 1560 to 1586 was Thomas Bickley, later bishop of Chichester.⁴⁰ This is unlikely, because John Becon was installed as Chancellor after William Overton became bishop in 1580. Overton, later claiming that Becon was not sufficient for the job, replaced him with Zachary Babington.⁴¹

Coventry and Lichfield was not a rich or prestigious diocese at the close of the sixteenth century. Phyllis Hembry has written that in 1535 the see possessed eight palaces, a figure which included Chester Inn, the Bishop's London residence.⁴² This was far below the national average, and limited the bishop's

³⁹ Willis writes (1727) that the estates of the chapter (save for a few 'demenses' at Alreswas and King's Bromley) consisted entirely of impropriations. The value in 1534 was stated to be £275. 13s. 4d., the tenths being £27. 11s. 4d. Over £200 came from impropriations from Bakewell, Hope and 'Tiddeswell cum capellis' in Derbyshire. the Chapter presented to St. Mary's, Lichfield and 'about eleven' other churches in the diocese, in most of which (as in their prebendal churches) they claimed peculiar jurisdiction.

⁴⁰ The diocesan chancellor is the chief representative of the bishop in the administration of the temporal affairs of the diocese. Usually president of the consistory court, he exercises the 'contentious jurisdiction of the bishop, and is the official (principal) entrusted with coercive discipline'. See Purvis, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Terms*; Cross and Livingstone, *Dictionary of the Church*.

⁴¹ See p.34-35. Overton nevertheless appears to have recognised that Bickley's abilities extended beyond his remit of the archdeaconry of Stafford. Bickley was present when Overton examined William Axton, the Shropshire Puritan, for non-conformity in 1582. A.Peel, *Second Part of a Register* (Cambridge, 1915), Book 1, p.73. For Axton, see chapter 1, pp.27-28.

⁴² Phyllis Hembry, 'Episcopal Palaces, 1535-1660', in E.W.Ives, R.J.Knecht and J.J.Scarisbrick (eds.), *Wealth and Power in Tudor England*, (London, 1978), pp.140-166; C.Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church* (Oxford, 1955), pp.14-38.

ability to exert his personal influence throughout the diocese.⁴³ Despite the abandonment of a plan for the wholesale seizure of episcopal endowments mooted in the 1530s, bishops were still under considerable pressure to part with episcopal manors outright, or to grant them, on favourable terms, to the crown or to courtiers.⁴⁴ Coventry and Lichfield was among a number of bishoprics which experienced a significant loss of wealth during the century. Leasing arrangements, on unfavourable terms, led to the impoverishment of the diocese, leaving later bishops with only a fraction of the revenue they had once enjoyed from their estates which further reduced their standing and influence. Episcopal palaces were sold off to courtiers seeking country seats. Beaudesert in Staffordshire, for example, was bought by the courtier Sir William Paget, who thus became Baron Paget of Beaudesert.⁴⁵ Bishop Wright (1632-1643) later complained that he lacked a suitable house, Lichfield being dilapidated, ‘moist Eccleshall [was a] *sepulchrum episcoporum*’, and Coventry had been on long lease since 1545.⁴⁶ Such depredations further reduced the bishop’s presence and influence in different parts of the diocese. The episcopal manors at Beaudesert, Heywood, Cannock and Rugeley (all Staffordshire) as well as Chester Inn in London all appear to have been alienated from the bishopric before 1548.⁴⁷ In view of this, and the alienation of Berkswich, Bishop Sampson was granted the rectories of Wolstanton (Staffordshire), Belgrave (Leicestershire), Towcester, Pightlesley and Buckby (Northants.), Tywyn (Merioneth) and the deanery and four prebends pertaining to Gnosall (Staffordshire). According to Dugdale, the Bishop parted with the manors of Gaydon, Chadshunt, Bishops Itchington and Tachbrooke, with the patronage of Bishops Tachbrook and Fenny-Compton at the same time. Describing the see as ‘miserably spoiled’, Willis remarked that little

⁴³ Canterbury possessed the highest number, twenty-one, and Winchester, fifteen.

⁴⁴ Phyllis Hembry, ‘Episcopal Palaces’, p.159.

⁴⁵ J. Strype, *Annals of the Reformation* (London, 1737), vol.iii, p.199. This took place under Bishop Sampson.

⁴⁶ *VCH, Staffordshire*, vol.III, pp55-56.

⁴⁷ *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, Pat.1, Edw.VI, August 20th. 1547.

remained for Elizabeth to take. Nevertheless, in 1573, Bishop Bentham made the Queen a grant of the rectory and advowson of Buckby for sixty years and, ten years later, Bishop Overton leased Belgrave rectory with some lands at Eccleshall to Elizabeth, for a period of fifty years.

Such losses, with other problems, ensured that the diocese was not considered the crown of a successful episcopal career; it proved merely a stepping-stone to more lucrative positions for four of the bishops in the period 1603-1642. Likewise, the low valuation of first fruits and clerical tenths underline the general poverty of livings, which probably deterred graduates from settling in the diocese. The relatively low numbers of educated Protestant ministers inevitably impeded the progress of diocesan reformation, and made the task facing evangelical leaders (amongst whom were the later bishops, Bickley, James and Goldborough) even more onerous.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ See Chapter One, pp.41,44.

CHAPTER 1

Bishop Overton, and the Problems of Coventry and Lichfield in the Early Seventeenth Century

At the turn of the century, William Overton had been bishop for over twenty years, and had therefore played a major role in attempting to shape the character of his see. This chapter looks at his career, preoccupations and personality, and at the effectiveness of his attempt to promote the reformed ministry in Coventry and Lichfield. His episcopate illustrates some of the problems facing all his successors, throughout the early Stuart period.

William Overton, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, 1580-1609

Born in 1527, William Overton was a client of Sir William Cecil. He was elected to a demiship at Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1539, becoming a perpetual fellow in 1551, and received both his B.D. and D.D. in 1566. His studies had been facilitated by an exhibition granted by Cecil from the lands of Glastonbury Abbey.¹ He spent Mary's reign in England, under the continuing patronage of Cecil, and was later installed, though not in orders, to 'one of the best prebends' at Winchester in 1559.² In 1560, aged thirty-three, he was ordained deacon, and afterwards priest, by Edmund Grindal, bishop of London, who in 1561 recommended him, unsuccessfully, for the provostship of Eton.³ A pluralist, he became a canon at Chichester in 1563.⁴ At Elizabeth's visit to Oxford, in 1564, Overton took a prominent part in the reception given to the Queen, being the set

¹ DNB; Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis*, (London, 1815 ed.), vol. 2, pp.49,50; Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, vol. iii, appendix to book I, no.xviii.

² PRO, SP 10/14/53; 11/11/9; C.H.Garrett, *The Marian Exiles* (Cambridge, 1938), pp.86-7.

³ Strype, *Life and Acts of Archbishop Grindal* (Oxford, 1821), pp.53-4; F.O.White, *Lives of the Elizabethan Bishops*, (London, 1898), p.271.

⁴ He was granted the Hampshire benefices of Upham and Nurstling in 1560, Exton in 1561 and Cotton (Staffordshire) in 1562. In 1569 the benefice of Buriton (Hampshire) was also conferred on him. DNB.

preacher at morning service in the cathedral, the day after her arrival.⁵ Later in the week he was one of the disputants in a debate, before Elizabeth, on the question 'whether it was lawful for a private person to take up arms against a bad prince?' Overton argued that 'it was lawful for a private person to consult the good of the Republic, and that good was best consulted if that bad Prince was killed'.⁶ In 1567, he was appointed to the treasurership at Chichester Cathedral. His first wife, Margaret, was the daughter of the Bishop, William Barlow.⁷

Overton's time at Chichester was marked by a number of controversies. He had an acrimonious dispute with one of his fellow prebendaries, the poet Thomas Drant, who publicly denounced him in the Cathedral, accusing him of covetousness, of being 'a great doctor of leases and a spoiler of woods upon the prebend and hospital'.⁸ Similar charges were to be reiterated by others when Overton was Bishop of Lichfield. Amongst a string of accusations, Drant also accused Overton of being 'a very hypocrite, a noble glorious and everlasting hypocrite: and nothing but a mere satchel of hypocrisy...like a vice in a play representing a grave man's part, but having no gravity'. According to Drant he was also 'swelling with the title of doctor, and had no doctrine'.

R.B.Manning has stated that marriage to Margaret Barlow brought Overton into greater prominence in the administration at Chichester, the Bishop becoming increasingly reliant on his son-in-law, which led Overton to believe that he might succeed him as Ordinary.⁹ The position, however, went to the dean, Richard Curteys, despite a letter from Overton to Cecil, before the appointment was made, warning that the 'diocese was everywhere full of papists and popism' and recommending William Day, the Provost of Eton, as the best man to succeed

⁵ The Queen was absent 'through some indisposition of the body'.

⁶ J. Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1823), p.209.

⁷ P.Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982), p. 45, fn.23,

⁸ Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, (1735 ed.), Book 2, pp. 657-8. Strype was unsympathetic to Drant's accusations, believing the poet to be 'out of his mind'.

⁹ R.B. Manning, *Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex* (Leicester, 1969), pp.42,58.

to the episcopate.¹⁰

Curteys' zeal to reform the diocese included the cathedral chapter, and led to the formation of an anti-Curteys faction around Overton.¹¹ This feud appears to have been caused by the Bishop's perceived attack on the jurisdiction of the chapter, rather than through an ideological disagreement. Theologically, Curteys and Overton ought to have been allies, given Overton's later accommodating attitude to Puritans. The Bishop resorted to packing the chapter with his followers, who sought to exclude Overton's party from the conduct of capitular affairs. Overton's group responded with a rival chapter meeting, and, as a result, the Bishop was forced to produce new statutes to prevent the issue of protestations by an incomplete chapter. The mutual antagonism between Curteys and Overton is evidenced in the accusations made by the Bishop's brother, who was vicar of Cuckfield. Accused of improper conduct by Henry Bowyer, the local squire, Edmund Curteys complained that the articles drawn against him were both 'false and forged', and that he was being tried at the Quarter Sessions at Lewes by a bench which was packed with 'Dr. Overton' (and others) 'who are known to be enemies ... of the Bishop'. There were private meetings amongst some of the leading citizens in Chichester, at which Overton was sometimes present, when Bishop Curteys was openly criticised.¹²

One of Overton's three surviving works also belongs to this period.¹³ A sermon delivered at the Sussex Assizes at East Grinstead, it was published by one

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.68-69. The letter warned against entrusting the bishopric to anyone who might be 'either weak in judgment or not steady in mind or more slack in painstaking'. Manning thinks that this was probably a reference to Curteys. Day later became Bishop of Winchester.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.67.

¹² One of the accusations leveled against the Bishop was that, when drinking in the home of Alderman Shervyn, he was 'so far overcome with drink, as was too unseemly to behold, and especially in a man of his calling'. Members of the Bishop's party later refuted these charges.

¹³ *A Godly and Pithy Exhortation made to the Judges and Justices of Sussex, and the whole County, assembled at the General Assizes by William Overton, D.D., and one of Her Majesty's Justices appointed for the Peace in the same county (1579?)*. The others are *Articles to be inquired of in the Ordinary Visitation of the right reverent Father in God, William, Lord Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield* (London, 1584), and his visitation sermon, *Oratio doctissimo et gravissimo, habita in domo capitulari Lichfield ad Praebendarios et reliquum clerum in visitatione Ecclesiae suae Cathedralis, an. 1600* (London, 1600). This is an exhortation to his diocesan clergy, as Bishop at Lichfield, to live at peace with one another.

‘M.M.’, who had found it ‘very learned and fruitful’ and wished to make it available to a wider audience. The sermon inveighed against the perniciousness of discord and dissension in both spiritual and temporal matters. Overton did not see how judges could serve the commonwealth, except they ‘first serve the Church’. He asked his listeners, ‘Are you ready to bind up the wounds of the commonwealth, even more as you look on the lamentable face of Christ’s Church, upon the deep wounds of His mystical body, so sore stricken with spiritual discord and dissension’?¹⁴ It was the duty of justices to repress Catholicism and all schisms and sects and to further the true catholic religion. Quarrels and controversies were to be avoided, and discord and dissension rooted up everywhere, ‘especially in church matters’. Among the causes of temporal discord, he excoriated the extortion ‘that is in the mighty’, the oppression of the wealthy and ‘the insatiable desire for having and the unreasonable practice of getting’.

The sermon was a true reflection of Overton’s anti-Catholicism, although his conventional attack on discord hardly matched his own record, then, or later. Covetousness and greed, which the sermon condemned, were characteristics which Drant had claimed to find in Overton- who was not a poor cleric. At Chichester, his income of over £127 was only made possible through pluralism.¹⁵ Writing to Leicester, a patron, when he was treasurer in the diocese, Overton dwelt on the mutual benefits that accrued from this arrangement: ‘Consider with yourself, I beseech you, what I am and what I have been towards your Lordship. I am your chaplain of old; I have been pliable to your letters and suits: I have been and am in case both able and ready to do you honour if you will use me’.¹⁶ An ambitious careerist, Overton wrote to the wife of John Becon in 1580, in another

¹⁴ ‘Souls are carried away by ravening wolves to be devoured of them, and are even now yet hanging in their chaps, and in their teeth, and being in the midst of their teeth do not feel their own misery’.

¹⁵ Manning, *Religion and Society*, p.174.

¹⁶ P.Collinson, ‘Letters of Thomas Wood, Puritan, 1566-1577’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, Special supplement 5 (1960), p.xxxv.

effort to secure his further advancement. Becon had recently (1579) been appointed joint Chancellor at Chichester.¹⁷ Overton's letter stated his confidence that if he was ever promoted, he would also advance the new Chancellor and his wife. If, owing to the help of Becon, 'it so fall out that by his mediation I be hereafter preferred to some good bishopric, wheresoever it be ... I pray you let me be a suitor to him and to you that we may be together and live together, he and I and you and my wife'.¹⁸ Becon used his influence with Leicester, and the Earl proposed Overton to the bishopric of Coventry and Lichfield, to which he was elevated in September 1580, receiving the rectories of Stoke-on-Trent and Hanbury at the same time. Becon was made Chancellor and prebendary at Lichfield.¹⁹

Overton was in his early fifties when he was translated to Lichfield. He had the spiritual care of a very large diocese, and he was well aware of the difficulties that were involved.²⁰ Writing to Burghley in May, 1582, Overton

¹⁷ Becon was a graduate of St. John's College, Cambridge. Elected as public orator in 1571, he had simultaneously held the office of proctor (1571-1572). His professional life was to be marked by a number of contentions. During his period as proctor he had headed the opposition of the senate to the code of statutes for the government of the university which had passed the great seal in September 1570. He was accused, by the heads of the colleges, of making a seditious oration, and of provoking disorder in the university. He resigned his oratorship in 1573. In 1574 he was installed as a canon of Norwich Cathedral, becoming chancellor of the diocese in 1575. During his time at Norwich he had devised a scheme whereby the Bishop would acquire a knowledge of all the clergy and ecclesiastical laymen in his diocese and also enable him to dispense with the 'abused jurisdiction of commissioners and other officials'. "Choice preachers", chosen from every deanery in the diocese, were to be made superintendents, who were to be given the authority to summon ministers and their churchwardens to monthly prophesyings or sermons. The superintendents were to have some disciplinary powers, and also to make reports on popish recusants within their deaneries. Regular opportunities were to be provided when these monitors could confer with the bishop and his chancellor. There is some similarity between this scheme and one introduced by Overton at Lichfield in 1584.

Curteys' commission to Becon was dated September 1578. The delay of a year in taking up his post at Chichester may have been due to a disagreement between Becon and the Bishop of Norwich. According to Manning, it took several months before the new chancellor could extricate himself from his difficulties and take up his new responsibilities.

See J.Venn and J.A.Venn, *Athenae Cantabrigienses, part I* (Cambridge, 1922), p.17; P.Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967), p.183; R.Manning, *Religion and Society*, p.118-9.

¹⁸ SP 12/137/31. The letter, dated 15 April, 1580, included his solemn promise before God, that 'I have not, nor shall have, any thing too dear for him and you, whether in spiritualities or temporalities to do good to to you or yours'.

¹⁹ F.O.White, *The Lives of the Elizabethan Bishops* (London, 1898), p.273.

²⁰ As Kenneth Fincham has observed, bishops were also expected to play a prominent part in the secular administration of their dioceses, and 'by the 1580s, almost every bishop commanded a seat, *ex officio*, on the local commissions of the peace'. Overton was a Justice for the four midland

described his position. 'I am here in a very p[er]ilouse country (and if I may speak without offence) the very sink of the whole realm, both for corrupt religion and life'.²¹ He complained to Sir Francis Walsingham, 'I have the stubbornest diocese in all this land, and a clergy most unwilling to show themselves ready and dutiful in any good service, and especially if it touches their purse never so little'.²²

Overton's spiritual concerns were those of a pastorally-exercised Calvinist bishop, his goals, to promote preaching, reform the ministry and discipline of the church, and 'deal roundly with papists'. His visitation articles, published in 1584, sought to correct a range of abuses within the diocese. Similar to those published by Grindal at York, in 1571, they nevertheless display a greater accommodation for the scruples of conscience of Puritan clerics.²³ For instance, Overton's Article Two simply asked whether Common Prayer 'be distinctly and audibly read within the parish', whereas Grindal demanded that the prayer book be read 'distinctly and reverently, as it is set forth in the laws of this realm, without any kind of alteration, and at due and convenient hours'.²⁴ Overton's enquiries also revealed a greater latitude to the regulation of public worship. Where the Bishop was concerned that the churches under his jurisdiction had the necessary fixtures and fittings appropriate for worship, Grindal was more particular and specific.²⁵ Both men targeted Catholics and Catholicism.²⁶ Grindal was burdened about the residual, outward evidences of popery (such as the use of the wrong rite in perambulations, or whether abrogated holy days were still being observed) while Overton was at pains to discover its more hidden manifestations. He enquired, for instance, whether papists from outside the diocese visited individuals within the see, and

counties in his see. He was active on the Staffordshire bench until 1609, the year of his death. K.Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor* (Oxford, 1990), p.97; S.A.H.Bourne and D.H.G.Salt (eds.), 'Staffordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls, 1581-1609', in *CHS* (Kendal, 1931-1950), 6 vols.

²¹ White, *Elizabethan Bishops*, p.275, from B Lansdowne MS xxxvi, 16, May 20 1582.

²² SP 12/149/37.

²³ W.Overton, *Articles to be inquired in the Ordinary Visitation* (London,1584); *Articles to be enquired of, within the Province of York, in the Metropolitan Visitation of the Most Reverend Father in God, Edmonde, Archbishop of York* (London, 1571).

²⁴ Grindal, Article I; see also Article 3.

²⁵ Compare Overton, Article 2b, with the lengthier requirements of Grindal, Article 2b.

²⁶ See Articles 3, 7, 8, 9.

sought to identify those who possessed Catholic books, had been converted to Catholicism or were once in Orders.⁵⁰ In summary, Overton's articles expressed the aspiration that his diocese would be equipped with zealous preachers, and revealed the Bishop's long-standing antipathy to Catholicism; they also demonstrated a greater tolerance than Grindal displayed of aspects of clerical non-conformity.

Overton was strongly committed to improving the level and quality of preaching in the diocese. In 1581, in response to the proposal by the House of Commons that the 'best learned preachers' should be given a share in the ordination and censure of ministers, Overton published Advertisements at his primary Visitation, 'for the strengthening and establishing of able ministers and the trial and reformation of the insufficient ministry'. They do not appear to have been implemented, however.⁵¹ In 1584, his second set of Visitation Articles were followed by Advertisements which were probably influenced by the clerical monitoring scheme that Becon had sought to introduce in Norwich, as well as the criticisms of episcopal ordination made by the Puritan, William Axton.⁵² The first stipulation of 1584 stated that, in view of the lack of a sufficient ministry, any person, thereafter presented to a benefice, should be publicly examined to ascertain his suitability in the consistory court at Lichfield, before the Bishop or Chancellor or Chancellor's deputy, assisted by four other preachers. (Overton was suspicious of testimonial letters, claiming that they were often written without any knowledge of the man they purported to recommend). The successful applicant, with the permission of the Ordinary, was to be given a month's trial in his appointed parish. At the end of this period he was to reappear before the episcopal board and, 'if no one prove against him some notorious fault', dispatched to his parish, after

⁵⁰ Article 7. See also Article 8, regarding the non-reception of communion, and those who move from house to house (presumably landed recusants) in an attempt to escape from the duty of attendance at worship; also Article 9, which seeks information about any person in the parish with kinsfolk overseas.

⁵¹ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p.183; Strype, *The Life and Acts of Archbishop Whitgift* (London, 1718), p.100.

⁵² For William Axton, see pp27-28.

testifying on oath that he had ‘not used simony’, directly or indirectly, to secure the living.³⁰ Overton also called for all curates to appear before an augmented episcopal board, where they were to exhibit their licences and be examined. Those failing to secure the board’s approval were to be given ‘warning to depart’, and the pluralist incumbent was to receive notification to ‘provide a more sufficient minister within a reasonable time’. Two of the later articles again emphasised the Bishop’s anti-papist stance.³¹

Overton’s efforts to establish an episcopal board of examiners met with official disapproval. Archbishop Whitgift vetoed the scheme, regarding the examiners, two of whom were puritans, as a ‘kind of seignorie’, and the proposed structure as containing elements of a Presbyterian model.³² One of Overton’s examiners was the non-conformist John Oxenbridge of Southam- an extraordinarily tactless choice. A ringleader of the *classis* movement of the 1580s and moderator of the fortnightly exercises at Coventry, Oxenbridge had established an exercise at Southam which had attracted the disapproval of the Queen, who had been ‘most grievously informed’ of its ‘schismatical tendencies’. Archbishop Grindal had ordered Overton’s predecessor, Bishop Bentham, to ‘see reformation’ and send Oxenbridge to London. Bentham had suppressed the exercise.³³ Overton also committed the tactical error of refusing to admit the crown presentee William Jennings to the rectory at Church Eaton, Warwickshire. As Rosemary O’Day comments, ‘in tampering with the patronage rights of the Crown, and in open liaison with radicals such as John Oxenbridge, Overton had

³⁰ The names of the four examining preachers were to be published at the Visitation

³¹ No.8 orders the ending of private baptism (‘of necessity seemeth tolerated by the Book of Common Prayer’). ‘Under the colour of such private baptisms many times wicked Jesuits, Mass Priests or Reconcilers have been known to baptise infants’. Another (no.7) is directed against the retention of the mass wafer at communion. Here Overton asks that the rule in the Book of Common Prayer, which stipulated that the bread used should be that ‘eaten at table with other meats’, should be observed to the letter.

³² This was criticised as being prejudicial ‘to the free liberte of the Arch[bishops] judgement, concerninge the sufficiencie or insufficiency of such a clerke being thus overruled and forestalled, not by the ordinaries alone, but by 4 other mens opinions...this smelleth of a kinde of popular approbation and election’. A. Peel (ed.), *The Second Parte of a Register*, (Cambridge, 1915), vol. I, p.263.

³³ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp.129,172,184,193,327.

truly overstepped the mark'.³⁴ The Articles were ordered to be revoked 'as containing a well spring of a pernicious platform, contrary to the settled estate of our church, contrary to law and contrary to Her Majesty's express pleasure and commandment'. Overton defended his use of Puritans as examiners, arguing that 'by this employing of their service may rather win them to conformity', and concluded maintaining that his authority in the diocese would be compromised by a hasty revocation or annulment. If his articles were dangerous he suggested that they 'might die of themselves by forbearing the execution, rather than be called in'. The Archbishop was not persuaded.³⁵

Overton appears to have been genuinely sympathetic towards Puritan preachers. We find evidence of his pastoral care when dealing with ministerial scruples of conscience in his handling of William Axton, vicar of Morton Corbet (Shropshire). Overton would have felt obliged to act against someone with such extreme views, but treated Axton with patience and sensitivity. In 1582, the vicar was charged with failing to make the sign of the cross at baptism and not wearing a

³⁴ R. O'Day, *The English Clergy* (Leicester, 1979), pp.68-69.

³⁵ A number of questions in the Articles met with official disapproval, and Overton took to his pen to protect himself before Whitgift. Defending his use of an examining board, which had been criticised for compromising the authority of the Ordinary, he reminded Whitgift that he (the Archbishop) had strengthened the laws regarding the monitoring of the suitability and qualifications of clerics, 'and yet good laws without due execution do smally profit'. When such means as money, letters and friendship had been used to obtain a benefice, it would be difficult to stop all corruption at once, as there would always be clerics and patrons who were willing to make a 'simoniacal bargain' to the discredit and disadvantage of religion. A Bishop who, for the prevention of simony, took four learned and incorrupt men to help him in his examination of clerics, and who yet kept the power of decision to himself was surely to be commended. As an example of the excellence of his articles, Overton cited the recent case of Jennings, who had been presented to Whitgift for institution to Church Eaton in Staffordshire. Whitgift had rejected him as unfit. Nevertheless, Jennings had appeared at Lichfield with letters from eight Privy Councillors recommending for admission. Overton had him examined, found him to be unsatisfactory and had reported this to the Council with the names of the examiners and a copy of his Visitation Articles and Advertisements. The Council had accepted Overton's report, thus vindicating his scheme. Overton defended his use of examiners who had refused to subscribe to the Archbishop's Articles, arguing that they were able men who would probably be won to conformity by the trust imposed in them. The Bishop maintained that there was nothing in his regulations to 'overrule or forestall' Whitgift's authority, nor that, as a result of a minister's probationary period, 'popular election' would ensue. In defence of his order regarding the use of common bread at communion, he had had the article included on the recommendation of 'most of the best preachers' in his diocese, who, acquainted with the superstitious disposition of the country people, wished to 'pluck out of the superstitious hearts of the country people the holy conceit of the wafer cake'. Peel, *Second Parte of a Register*, vol.1, pp.260-267.

surplice.⁵⁹ Axton claimed that the country people were so ignorant that they thought making the sign of the cross an essential part of baptism, and there was no one to teach them of their error. Deploing what he saw as the superstition of the Shropshire country-folk, he maintained that ‘the Cross is becoming a horrible idol, even in the seat of Jesus Christ’, and that its use was drawing the people to ‘a second popery that will be worst than the first’.⁶⁰ The surplice was not ‘a thing indifferent’ but ‘abominable and filthy’, the garment(s) of anti-Christ’s priesthood.⁶¹ Asked by Overton for his views on episcopacy, the vicar boldly asserted that every minister was a bishop and that Overton was not lawfully called of God to his position. Diocesan bishops had no right to ordain ministers because they neither obtained the consent of the eldership, tested candidates regarding their character, learning or ability to preach, nor ordained them to a definite congregation. Overton defended his record by maintaining that he admitted none to the ministry without the letters of some noble man (*sic*) or ‘worshipful gentleman in their commendations’. Axton replied, ‘Beware how you break the institution of God. This is a door open to let in thieves and robbers. God give you repentance and a more sound conscience hereafter to keep hirelings out of the church of God, by whom there is a most lamentable slaughter of the souls of God His people’.⁶² At length, after three hearings, Overton deprived the vicar of his living and charged him, and Axton was ‘driven thereupon to seek another country’.⁶³

Overton had responded to Axton’s arguments and attacks with patience and had offered a generous compromise, using his authority as Ordinary only after Axton had remained intransigent. This is not the only instance of Overton’s

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.68-74. Peel suggests 1570 as the date of the proceedings, indentifying the Bishop as Overton’s predecessor, Thomas Bentham. Both date and Bishop are wrongly attributed as Axton was not admitted to the rectory until 1580 (see Lambeth Palace Library, Reg. Grindal, ii f. 438). The proceedings are recorded in LJRO, B/V/2/13 Acta 31 Aug; 20 Sept; 21 Nov 1582; B/C/3/10 18 Jan 1583. see *VCH Staffs*, vol 3, p.50n.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.68-9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.72.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.74.

benevolent attitude towards Puritans. He allowed the exercises at Burton-on-Trent to flourish in the 1590s and 1600s, granting licences to preach to Arthur Hildersham and William Bradshaw, both of whom had been previously silenced by their respective diocesans.⁴¹ Richard Stainforth, forced to resign from his living in the diocese of York because of his failure to conform, was instituted by Overton to the living of Breadsall, Derbyshire, in 1605. He proved a thorn in the side of successive bishops, pursuing 'a ministry of sustained Puritan non-conformity'.⁴² During the period 1605-1609, when clerical subscription to the Three Articles was pressed, Overton's response to Archbishop Bancroft's circular to remove ministers who refused to subscribe and conform, but spare more moderate clergy who might be won round to subscription, tended towards leniency. Fincham has found only one instance of a cleric who may have been ejected from his charge, Richard Ward of Shustoke- and even this is uncertain. This compares with nine ejections in the diocese of Norwich, under Bishop Chaderton and sixteen in Peterborough under Thomas Dove.

Overton's encouragement of Puritans remained fairly consistent throughout his episcopate. His harsh treatment of Hugh Clarke, the father of the martyrologist, can be explained by their differences over material concerns rather than doctrine. In 1590, the Bishop, who could be ruthlessly determined in pursuit of his aims, opposed Clarke's institution to Wolston, Warwickshire, because he wished to present one of his chaplains to the living.⁴³ Having been unsuccessful, he attempted to have Clarke removed. The vicar complained to Archbishop Whitgift, who found in Clarke's favour, sending Overton down to Wolston to

⁴¹ C.Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London, 1964), p.317. Hill maintains that Overton was persuaded to licence Bradshaw on the gift of an annual presentation of a brace of bucks. He cites Samuel Clarke's 'The Lives of Some English Divines' in *A Martyrologie* (1652), pp.117 and 128. Clarke's lives were reprinted in several editions, others of which are not so forthcoming as to Overton's motives, and more respectful.

⁴² K.Fincham, 'Clerical Conformity and Nonconformity, c. 1583-1640', in P.Lake and M.Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c.1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 125-158; R.A. Marchant, *Puritans and the Church Courts, 1560-1642* (London, 1960), pp.281-2; R.Clark, 'Lists of Derbyshire Clergymen, 1558-1662', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, 104 (1984), pp.19-61.

⁴³ See also example of Overton's reputed treatment of John Becon, pp.34,35.

acknowledge his fault before Clarke's congregation. Despite this humiliation, Samuel Clarke reports that the Bishop and his father were subsequently friends.⁶⁷ The case of Robert More, the vicar of Rushall, offers another example of Overton's dealings with a Puritan minister. Flouting the Prayer Book rubric, which required parishioners to communicate kneeling, More refused to administer the elements to those who knelt, declaring that 'yt was on Idole if they did reverence it'. Overton made him do penance for this aberration, rather than suspending him; a relatively mild rebuke for contradicting liturgical requirements, and certainly not indicative of the Bishop's harshness towards Puritans, as D.A.Johnson suggests.⁶⁸ One of the accusations levelled against Overton by Dr. John Becon, in their dispute over the diocesan chancellorship, was that he had offered Marby, an anabaptist, a licence to preach and wished to appoint him to the benefice of St. Michael's, Coventry.⁶⁹ The allegation may have been false, but Overton does appear to have been prepared to use Puritans for the promotion of gospel preaching and, except in extreme cases, was unwilling to pry too exactly into their conduct of public worship. Hoping to win them to conformity by employing their services, he expressed (as Patrick Collinson has put it) 'the whole Grindalian policy in a nutshell'.⁷⁰

Overton's enthusiasm to promote reformed religion was complemented by an equally strong drive to eradicate Catholicism. This had been a feature of his Chichester sermon; he had exhorted the justices to be zealous in their endeavours to eradicate Catholicism and thus store up for themselves treasures in heaven. He later preached a similar message to the Queen, urging her to further God's cause by repressing papists, a course of action which would assure her royal person of divine protection, 'though the Devil himself, and his vice-Devil the Pope, and all

⁶⁷ S.Clarke, *The Lives of Thirty Two Divines* (London, 1677), pp.128-131.

⁶⁸ LJRO, B/C/3/10, 6th August, 1586; J.E.Booty (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer, 1559* (Washington, 1982), pp.263-4; *VCH, Staffs*, vol.iii, p.51.

⁶⁹ J.Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, Book 3, Appendix, xvii. Becon was responding to Overton's charge that the Chancellor favoured those who were enemies of the Queen's proceedings, and was on familiar terms with Marby.

⁷⁰ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p.184.

the Popish Enemies she had in the world, conspired never so much against her'.⁷¹ In 1581, after his arrival at Lichfield, he called for an Ecclesiastical Commission for recusants, partly in response to the success of Catholic missionaries in Shropshire. Commissioners were sent out, and he wrote to Burghley that in the county 'which was one of the most conformable in the diocese, there was near 100 detected and presented for recusancy'. Overton warned of the need to check Catholicism 'in that country, and other shires in his diocese, worse than that'.⁷² A zealous anti-Romanist, he attempted to comply with official requests in certifying convicted recusants, but lamented to the Privy Council that 'the peculiar jurisdictions are very many; the recusants, either for the most part or the chief of them, so hid and harboured therein that I cannot, without further authority or assistance, search them out, much less certify them in such due sort or order as I should'.⁷³

Overton's letter (of 1582) underlines his Catholic concerns, and contains examples of the self-assurance possessed by some Staffordshire Catholics, a local characteristic which ensuing years did little to dampen. The Bishop complained that excommunication played into the hands of recusants who were 'glad they have so good Occasion to be cut off from Church, thinking to avoid the Penalty of the Statute', accused him of being a hard and cruel man, and yet 'do laugh all my Doings to scorn'. His latitudinarianism with regard to Puritans was not replicated in his attitude towards Catholics. He reported Lord Paget, responsible for the provision of bread for the Easter communion at Burton-on-Trent, who 'would have forced [the parishioners] to use little singing Cakes after the old Popish fashion'.⁷⁴

Overton was quite prepared to challenge influential people of Catholic sympathies. His antipathy towards Catholicism, and his concern to protect the jurisdiction of the Church, was shown in a letter to Burghley in January 1582,

⁷¹ See p.22; Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, vol.iii, Book 3, pp.96-7.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Book I, p.43.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Book 3, Appendix, xix, p.29.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.31-2.

about the lawyer and J.P., Richard Crompton of Checkley. The Justice, using clerical non-conformity as an excuse to silence a Puritan ministry, had sent a clergyman to jail in the middle of a service for not wearing a surplice nor following the Book of Common Prayer correctly, assuming an authority over church matters which belonged to the Diocesan alone. Overton informed Burghley that the minister was no dolt, but a man endued with good gifts, a zealous preacher, 'counted rather painful in his charge than otherwise, sober in his life and behaviour and not touched for his conversation in any way'. It was not the right of an interfering J.P. to seek to reform offences which should be dealt with through the church courts. Overton denounced Crompton as a church papist and an intimate friend of papists, who was motivated by malice and was biding his time until the return of Catholicism. 'Such men love but to wait for the day'. The Bishop declared that if Burghley discharged the likes of Crompton from their positions he would be doing God and his country 'good service'. The plea fell on deaf ears; Crompton remained on the bench.⁷⁵

The other defining characteristic of Overton's episcopate was his repeated clashes with other individuals, groups and institutions, both inside and outside the diocese. Some were triggered by his determination to uphold his episcopal rights to the full. Until 1548 the city of Lichfield had been part of the manor of Lichfield, which was held by the bishop. In that year Bishop Sampson had been forced to give up his lordship of the city, excluding the close, to the newly established corporation. In 1582, against the wishes of the citizens, Overton reasserted his right to ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the city. He maintained that 'Lichfield is not the city it hath been', claiming that its bad government was the result of its removal from episcopal control. The claim generated considerable ill-feeling between the Bishop and the town, and Overton proved unsuccessful in his attempts to restore secure episcopal jurisdiction. He quitclaimed the right to

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Book I, pp.23-26; 'Quarter Sessions Roles ii, 1589-1593', *C.H.S.* (Kendall,1932), p.368.

Elizabeth in 1598, and the Queen confirmed the corporation as lord of the manor.⁷⁶

The same year saw an agreement between the city and the Bishop over the appointment of bailiffs. The corporation was to present him with a choice of at least two candidates, from which the Bishop was to choose one to be the senior bailiff.⁷⁷

Overton also quickly became embroiled in conflict with his cathedral clergy. In December 1580, soon after the commencement of his episcopate, he was faced with the combined opposition of the Dean and Chapter, and John Becon, the new Chancellor. As we have seen, Becon owed his position to Overton.⁷⁸ The Bishop demanded a *subsidiium charitativum* from his clergy because he was in debt, caused partly by the expenses he had incurred in his pursuit of the bishopric and partly by the litigation in which he was involved. The chapter refused to pay, arguing it was exempted from the *subsidiium*, and that such a claim had never before been made to enable a bishop to meet with what were seen as normal expenses. Overton responded by criticising the Dean, threatening the canons with a writ of *de scandalis*, and imprisoning two of their number. Angered, the chapter complained to Burghley, accusing Overton of financial irregularity and claiming that the controversy was ‘clamorous and offensive to the whole country’. The case collapsed, but Overton secured an order from High Commission which directed that the two canons, whom he had had imprisoned, should lend him £100 each, or appear before the Court. One, seventy years old and house-bound, acceded to Overton’s demand, the other went with Dean Boleyn to London, where he was ordered to pay costs of £30 to the Bishop.⁷⁹ Little love was lost between the contending parties. The Bishop complained to Burghley that the city and church at Lichfield, ‘with their peculiar jurisdictions’ were, in comparison with the rest of the diocese the most ‘amiss’. Out of these peculiars, ‘as out of a full Fountain,

⁷⁶ Quitclaim: a formal renunciation of a claim.

⁷⁷ *VCH, Staffs.*, vol.14, pp.16,67,76.

⁷⁸ Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, vol iii, Book I, p.94-95; see pp., 22,23.

⁷⁹ *V.C.H., Staffs.*, vol. 3, p.171.

flow all Corruption, both of Life and Religion in my Dioces'.⁸⁰ There were further disputes between Overton and the chapter, and their mutual antagonism lasted for years. He refused to recognise the validity of the Cathedral statutes, while the Dean and his associates, on their part, were reluctant to confirm grants and leases, offices and annuities which Overton had made to his son-in-law, Plasted. Boleyn and the chapter saw this as nepotism, arguing that the possessions of the bishopric should not be thus squandered.⁸¹

Overton was also involved in contentious law suits. In 1581 he petitioned the Privy Council that 'he might be relieved from the injurious effects of certain leases' granted on some Warwickshire manors 'by former bishops, the rents being factiously withheld by Edwin Fisher, now in possession'.⁸² He sued Fisher, who had exploited a legal flaw in the agreement made by his deceased father and Bishop Baynes, and was refusing to pay the stipulated yearly rent charge of £82 10s. Overton's right to the money was promptly established by the passing of an act in the Bishop's favour.⁸³ Overton also sued Lord Paget and others for rights over property which, he claimed, they were illegally withholding from the see.⁸⁴

Overton was soon embroiled in a further dispute with his chancellor, John Becon. According to John Strype, it was instigated by the support Becon had given to the chapter over the *subsidiium charitativum*.⁸⁵ Overton, claiming that Becon was unfit for office, attempted to oust him by appointing his son-in-law, Zachary Babington, first as joint office holder with Becon, and then as sole chancellor. Strype records that 'this occasioned a resistance and disturbance in the

⁸⁰ Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, vol.iii, appendix, no.xix, p.30.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*; W.Pierce,(ed.), *The Marprelate Tracts, 1588-1589* (London, 1911), p.156, fn.

⁸² SP 12/147/89.

⁸³ *V.C.H., Staffs.*, vol 3, p.52.

⁸⁴ According to Overton's estimate, the cost of litigation against Paget, the city of Lichfield and others totalled about £780, a figure in excess, he claimed, of his annual revenue (£560). R. O'Day, 'Cumulative Debt: The Bishops of Coventry and Lichfield and their Economic Problems, c. 1540-1640', *Midland History*, 3 (1975-6), pp.77-93.

⁸⁵ J.Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, vol.3, Book 1, p.95.

Cathedral church which amounted to a riot'.⁸⁶ Becon maintained that in the heat of the quarrel, Overton, egged on by his wife, had publicly referred to Mrs. Becon in language which 'called an honest gentlewoman's good name in question, who through her whole life was never noticed with any suspicion of lightness', and that the Bishop had treated her shamefully.⁸⁷ She had also encountered Overton's animosity at first hand. These slurs were exacerbated because the Bishop's elevation to Lichfield had been made possible through Becon's support, and Overton had promised to reward him by granting him a position in his administration.⁸⁸ The Bishop's treatment so affected Mrs. Becon that, 'being young with chielde [she] took such an inward grief, that she never joyed until she was delivered of a man chielde before her time, hardly escaping with her life'.⁸⁹ Becon, infuriated by the abuse he and his wife had received, vented his feelings about the Bishop in public.⁹⁰ Becon and Babington held rival courts for a time, the ex-Chancellor suing Overton from the consistory court in Lichfield to Star Chamber. In June 1583, Archbishop Grindal was forced to intervene. He asked John Whitgift, Bishop of Worcester and future Archbishop of Canterbury, to head an Ecclesiastical Commission to look into the dispute. Prior to the Commission, Grindal had tried to persuade the Bishop that Becon and Babington might exercise joint jurisdiction and for a short time after the imposition of the Commission this was the case. After February 1585, however, Becon's name disappears from the

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.71. Overton claimed that Becon had shown himself unfit for office because his patents were not acceptable, he was unskilled in his practice of the law and that he was corrupt, one that 'hunteth after bribes'.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Book 1, appendix xvii, p.25.

⁸⁸ Or so Becon claimed. The letter to Mrs. Becon, purporting to offer a position to her husband which Overton would provide if Becon used his influence on Overton's behalf, is a copy of the original which Becon himself made. See SP 12/137/31. Overton's promise in the letter is, 'and I promise unto you before the Eternal God I have not, nor shall have, anything to dear for him and you, whether in spiritualities or temporalities to do you good and yours'. Quoted in F.O.White, *Lives of Elizabethan Bishops*, p.285.

⁸⁹ Quoted on F.O.White, *Lives of Elizabethan Bishops*, p.274.

⁹⁰ According to Overton, Becon referred to him as a 'beastly knave, a whorson knave, a perjured man and a simoniacal bishop'. Becon admitted to using such terms, seeing the treatment he and his wife had received at the Bishop's hands as warranting such language.

consistory court records; it is probable that he had been effectively ousted by Overton and Babington.⁹¹

When Whitgift arrived in Coventry and Lichfield he found it to be 'in sundry parts ... out of frame', the 'diocese much discontented with their diocesan', and his remit was extended to cover the whole see.⁹² In three years Overton had, by mismanagement, rapacity, tactlessness, and promise-breaking, offended a number of vested interests across a broad religious spectrum, amongst whom were some Reformed fellow-travellers. Claiming he had adopted a policy of *principiis obsta*, he maintained he was the object of a diocesan-wide conspiracy, although his recourse to self-justification before Burghley predated the appointment of the Ecclesiastical Commission. He declared he had been misused by the Lichfield prebendaries; furthermore 'there had been marvellous Plats laid then, in the Beginning of his Government, to have dowed him'. Overton averred that such attempts would have been successful, but for 'such honourable countenance and Backing' that his patron provided. He saw himself as the object of personal vendettas, and claimed that 'every clergyman that I deal withal in the way of Justice, is ready to quarrel with me, and to vex me with Suits; so that there is, as it were, a conspiracy of my Adversaries to load me with Troubles all at once, and so to bear me, or rather beat me down'.⁹³

Overton's reputation does not emerge untarnished from these controversies. Burghley's patronage was clearly of primary importance to him, and he sought to preserve it by self-justification and denigrating his opponents.⁹⁴ His nepotism, financial greed, apparent dishonesty, and treatment of perceived

⁹¹ Strype, *Grindal*, p.404, 405, 409; LJRO, B/C/3/10, 5 Feb. 1585.

⁹² Quoted in P. Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal* (London, 1978), p.285; Strype, *Whitgift*, pp.99, 100.

⁹³ Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, vol.iii, Book 3, p.96; Book 1, appendix xviii, p.27.

⁹⁴ In 1585, Becon sent a report claiming that Overton and some of the collectors of the Queen's Subsidy of the Clergy were financially in need, and might not return all the money they had collected. The authorities were obviously uncertain of Overton's trustworthiness; a stop was put on the collection and others were appointed to gather the Subsidy. Overton again justified himself to Burghley. The Bishop declared that he was content 'to put up all these wrongs...at the Doctor's (Becon) Hands and to wear them out as I may. Only I beseech your Lordship, know the man hereafter, and take heed of this Lettermonger'. Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, Book 1, pp.333-334.

adversaries were in marked contrast to his sermons exhorting peace and harmony amongst the clerical and lay community. The Ecclesiastical Commission found Overton to be covetous and contentious, but also declared the clergy not to be without fault in the controversy. Overton informed the Vicar-General that certain diocesan matters were out of order because he was 'kept useless in his office', due to the presence of the Commission. Their visitation should therefore end. Only then would he be able to reform these faults, and 'have no cause to excuse himself, nor lay the blame on their necks, who had nothing to do therewith'.⁹⁵

The early years of Overton's episcopate were thus marred by contentions and controversies. He had engaged in an attempt to return Lichfield to episcopal jurisdiction which was to be unsuccessful. He had quarrelled with his cathedral chapter and been involved in an expensive and harmful legal battle with a Chancellor to whom he owed his elevation. His attempts at church reform had been vetoed by Whitgift, and his dispute with the Dean and chapter had been resolved only by outside arbitration. He had been unsuccessful in his attempts to collect sufficient monies, either for himself or for the government, and maintained that effective episcopal government was thwarted by the number of peculiars within the diocese.⁹⁶

The Bishop had also attracted criticism from outside the diocese. He wrote to Sir Richard Knightley informing him that he had licensed a Mr. King to preach, and would contribute towards his stipend; Knightley passed the information on to the Earl of Leicester, Overton's erstwhile patron, commenting that 'he ever distrusted the Bishop's liberality'.⁹⁷ Marprelate mentioned him by name amidst the rest of the 'swinish rabble' of bishops, whom he accused as 'proud prelates, intolerable withstanders of the Reformation, enemies of the gospel'.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Strype, *Life of Whitgift* p.106.

⁹⁶ Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, vol. 3, Book 2, appendix xix, p.32.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.28. Knightley had been a supporter of the exercises at Southam of which Oxenbridge had been moderator in the 1570s. He was from Fawsley, Northants.

⁹⁸ Pierce, *The Marprelate Tracts*, p.24.

Not all this criticism should be taken at face value. Marprelate's fault-finding is contradicted by Overton's zeal for a preaching ministry and the articles contained in his 1584 Advertisements. His accusation that the Bishop was a dunce is refuted by substantial evidence.⁹⁹ Burghley's comment that Overton had 'made seventy ministers in one day for money, some tailors, some shoemakers and other craftsmen. I am sure the greatest part of them are not worthy to keep horses', was made before Queen Elizabeth and Whitgift, in the same year. It reveals Burghley's disenchantment with his client, but is also problematic.¹⁰⁰ The statement is hard to gainsay or confirm. It may have contained an element of truth, though the cause of Overton's behaviour was more likely to have been based on necessity than greed. Overton had a large diocese with livings that were poorly endowed.¹⁰¹ There was little to attract graduates into the area, and he was probably taking the only course available to ensure that some parishes and chapelries were provided with ministers to read Common Prayer and the Book of Homilies. Furthermore, a Bishop who was burdened about the abuses of a system that was failing to monitor preachers and curates, and sought to persuade Whitgift to withdraw his veto of a scheme to rectify the situation, was unlikely to be simultaneously ordaining a multitude of men completely unfitted for the task. Overton was certainly discriminating in the ministers he licensed to preach. Of the 82 within the diocese in 1602, 49 had been accredited by Overton. He therefore licensed, on average, fewer than three preachers a year. The Puritan survey of Staffordshire of 1604 was critical of all those clerics it felt fell short of the requirements of the ministry, and silent about those of whom it approved. Very few of the preachers that Overton licensed were singled out for comment, a negative indication that 'his' preachers had at least some competence, and a sign that he was not licensing preachers indiscriminately.

⁹⁹ i.e., his academic career, his participation in the Oxford debate held before the Queen, his reply to Whitgift in defence of his Articles and Advertisements.

¹⁰⁰ Conyers Read, *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1960), pp302-3.

¹⁰¹ See p.41.

The Puritan attack on Overton of 1586 is sometimes harder to gainsay for lack of evidence to the contrary.⁷⁹ However the contention that the bishopric was worth £1,000 per annum is questionable. Overton had claimed that his gross income in the 1580s was £560, which, in view of the reduction in size of the diocese, and the sale and leasing of episcopal lands, was a much more likely figure than the one given by the Puritans.⁸⁰ The criticism of granting many leases to the Queen 'for the gratification of his friends thereby undermining the financial health of the diocese' is probably an exaggeration. Pightsley rectory, for example, was leased to the Queen in 1582, but Overton also sought to bring church property back under the jurisdiction of the church, as his case against Fisher and others testifies. A further accusation was that he offered hospitality in a 'base and despicable manner to the dishonour and reproach of his calling', was echoed in Sir Richard Knightley's distrust of Overton's generosity. Amongst other allegations are the charges that he took £2,400 of the Queen's income into his hands from the tenths, subsidies and first fruits that he had imposed and that he made 'spoil and havoc of the ancient woods of his bishopric to the receipt well nigh of £1,000'.⁸¹ Some of the criticism levelled against Overton is questionable or exaggerated. The Bishop was, however, frequently censured for being covetous, quarrelsome and unscrupulous, and these charges look far more convincing.

What was the state of his see at the accession of James I, after over twenty years of his episcopate? Overton had found a diocese in which Catholicism and church papism were still rife. His tolerant line towards Puritans reflected both his personal leanings and his perception of diocesan priorities, the need to harness all the available forces in the fight to promote the gospel. Progress, however, proved

⁷⁹ Peel, *Second Part of a Register*, vol.2, pp.16,17.

⁸⁰ Overton claim that his gross income from temporalities pensions and appropriated churches was £560, £200 less than the bishop's income in 1535. This figure seems more likely than the one given by the Puritans because of the reduction in the size of the see at the formation of the bishopric of Chester, and the alienation of temporalities from the 1530s onwards. Browne Willis stated that the income in 1727 was just under £600, which is remarkably close to Overton's figure. See, however, O'Day, 'Cumulative Debt', pp.85-6, who argues that Overton's listing of his revenue in 1583 was an underestimation.

⁸¹ Peel, *Second Part of a Register*, vol.2, p.16.

minimal, through his own defects of character, the scale of the task, and the very limited resources at his disposal. A review of the state of the parochial clergy will underline the problems he left for his successors to face.

The Clergy of the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield

Despite his reforming ambitions, Overton proved an ineffective diocesan. The clerical surveys made under his episcopate reveal that the see stagnated under his leadership. In part, the problem was structural. As he complained to Cecil, the diocese contained was the large numbers of peculiars. The main peculiar jurisdictions were those of the dean, dignitaries and prebendaries of Lichfield Cathedral and those of the royal free chapels.¹⁰⁵ The Cathedral possessed forty-six parochial jurisdictions, thirty-three being in Staffordshire, eight in Derbyshire, four in Warwickshire and one in Shropshire. Three Shropshire parishes were under the Bishop's peculiar jurisdiction. Overton claimed that his attempts at discipline were frustrated by the protection afforded by peculiars. With respect to advowsons, by far the greatest patron in the diocese was the Crown, with the patronage of about sixty benefices, followed by the dean and chapter. The Bishop held the advowson of only fourteen cures and thus had relatively little immediate parochial influence. He complained that he had 'the stubbornest diocese in all the land, and a clergy most unwilling to show themselves ready and dutiful in any good service'.¹⁰⁶

The standards of the clergy were not impressive. In 1584 Overton maintained that 'in Staffordshire archdeaconry, where there are about 150 cures, there is scarce the thirtieth part of a parish furnished with a tolerable preacher'.¹⁰⁷ This state of affairs was caused, in part, by the generally low levels of clerical

¹⁰⁵ The Royal Free Chapels were at Bridgnorth, Penkridge, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury St. Mary. Tettenhall included the church at Codsall. Bridgnorth included the churches of St. Leonard and St. Mary Magdalen as well as the parishes of Alveley, Claverley, Quatford and Bobington. D.B. Robinson (ed.), *Diocesan Probate and Church Commissioners' Records, Cumulative Handlist* (Stafford, 1970), p.45.

¹⁰⁶ See p. 24, and chapter 2.

¹⁰⁷ *VCH, Staffs*, vol. 3, p.53, quoting from B.M., Eg. MS. 1693, f 118.

financial reward, which discouraged graduates from entering the parochial ministry in the late sixteenth century. According to Hill, almost every economic development in the century contributed to the impoverishment of a large section of the clergy.⁸⁵ In 1585, Whitgift reckoned that in England half the benefices with a cure were worth less than £10, and that most of these were below £8. In the 1602 Elizabethan Clergy List for the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, comprising a total of 461 cures, only 69 livings are recorded as worth £10 or over. Not all clerical stipends are recorded in the List, but from the figures available over three-quarters of the livings in the diocese fell under £10.⁸⁶ In 1587, Convocation maintained that the value of sums recorded in the Queen's Book had halved, and in Elizabeth's reign the minimum competence for a minister was taken to be £30, many livings being thus deemed inadequate.⁸⁷ Not one of the figures recorded for Coventry and Lichfield came up to this 'minimum figure'; while poor livings were a national problem, the diocese was worse off than most, and therefore amongst the least attractive. In such a situation, pluralism was necessary for financial survival, and clergy engaged in illegal work. Ministers had been forbidden by law to take lands to farm, to buy or sell in way of merchandise, or to intermeddle openly with any artificer's occupation.⁸⁸ Only a few examples of clerics engaged in illegal activities can be found in the Puritan surveys of Warwickshire (c.1586) and Staffordshire (1604), though this may be because it was too common to be deemed worthy of mention.⁸⁹ At Meriden the minister, Williams, was described

⁸⁵ Hill points out that with the passing of the proscription of marriage, incumbents often had families to support. The clergy only had a life interest in benefices. In the case of the death of her husband, the widow of a clergyman was given no pension; also families had no provision, should the incumbent be deprived of his cure.

⁸⁶ J.C.Cox, 'An Elizabethan Clergy List of the Diocese of Lichfield', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 6 (1884), pp.157-180.

⁸⁷ Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church*, pp.200-203.

⁸⁸ 21 H8 c13. Hill has ingeniously suggested that Burghley's comment about Overton's alleged ordination of seventy artisans in one day, was rather like purchasing an annuity. See Hill, *Economic Problems*, p.13. If so, the annuity was often very meagre. The ordinands might have been better off if they had forgone ordination and applied themselves more rigorously to their original occupations.

⁸⁹ Peel, (ed.), *A Seconde Part.*, vol.2, pp.165-174; A.Peel, 'A Puritan Survey of the Church in Staffordshire in 1604', *English Historical Review*, (1911), pp.338-352.

as being a serving man and ‘a drunkard, a common chopper and changer at markets’. (Paradoxically, he had little need to supplement his clerical earnings, being ‘double beneficed’ and possessing a ‘competent living’).¹¹³ William Pate, the minister of Manceter, had ‘some gift which he neglecteth to use ... for he dwelles at Nuneton. A bailiffe of husbandrie’, while at Checkley in Staffordshire, the curate, Rathbone, was ‘a practitioner in phisic, but seldom in divinity’.¹¹⁴

Cox maintains that with 461 names, the 1602 Clergy List is ‘nearly complete, save that it omits the Staffordshire deanery of Lapley and Trysull’.¹¹⁵ According to Willis in 1737, the missing deanery contained thirty-nine chapelries and benefices. Of the total clergy in the 1602 List, 110, less than a quarter, were graduates.¹¹⁶ The possession of a degree, however, was not synonymous with being a preacher; only 82 men were licensed to preach, less than one fifth of the total, and this figure included some non-graduates, although these were usually restricted to preaching in their own cure.¹¹⁷

A comparison of the information available from the deanery of Stoneleigh (Archdeaconry of Coventry) in 1586 and 1602 reveals that in 1586, according to the Puritans, the deanery contained twenty-seven benefices and was without any licensed preachers.¹¹⁸ In 1602, nine of the men who had featured in the earlier survey were still in their cures. Three of these had met with approval in the earlier survey, like the incumbent of Radway, Richard Hill, described as ‘an honest man of towardliness’. Of the other six, three remained whom the Puritans had regarded as unsatisfactory. Thomas Nicholson of Fenny Compton (‘neither learned nor honest’), Richard Poole/Powell of Great Dassett (‘negligent, no learning’) and John James of Little Dassett (‘suspected not to be sound in religion’) were still in

¹¹³ Peel, *Second Parte*, vol.2, p.171.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*; Peel, ‘A Puritan Survey’, p.344.

¹¹⁵ J.Cox, *An Elizabethan Clergy List*, p.157.

¹¹⁶ 38 were B.A.s; 65, M.A.s; 2, B.D.s; 4 D.D.s; 1 Bachelor at Law. The figure does not include the minister at Sutton-in-the-Field and Trussley, who was ‘a student at Cambridge seven years’.

¹¹⁷ 49 were licensed by Overton and 2 by Bentham. Of the others, 17 were from Canterbury, 6 from York, one each from Lincoln, Ely and Norwich, and one was granted by two doctors when the see of Lichfield was vacant).

¹¹⁸ Willis maintained that Stoneley contained 32 benefices.

office.¹¹⁹ Similarly, the Puritan figures for the deanery of Marten (also Coventry) show that of the seventeen ministers named in the 1586 survey, nine were still exercising their ministry in 1602. Five of these had been found unsatisfactory by the Puritans. These included John Turner of Napton ('unlearned, a gamster') and the pluralist rector of Radbourne, Griffith Lloyd, castigated as 'unlearned, having neither church nor people, he hath another living in another diocese, an ale-house haunter'.¹²⁰ The figure of three preachers listed in the earlier survey had not increased by 1602. None of the parishes, cited above as examples, were peculiars. The situation in 1602 reveals a lack of effective discipline within the archdeaconry that was not corrected by the Bishop. In terms of educational standards, Overton had to make the best of the clergy prepared to work in the diocese; but he could and should have done more to impose a decent standard of moral behaviour.

A further comparison between the two lists shows that the number of preachers in the archdeaconry of Coventry remained almost constant between 1586 and 1602. In 1586 twenty-three licensed preachers were listed, while sixteen years later, this number had increased by only one, a figure which included the pluralist Luke Smith, the incumbent at Birmingham, a living the Puritans regarded as 'very sufficient', and Solihull (which the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* valued at £24, and the 1586 survey at £100). In some parishes the situations had changed for the better (at Harbury, for example, the vicar of 1586, Matthew Pickering, 'surnamed the vicar of hell for his ruffianly life', had been succeeded by 1602 by the preacher John Overton). Overall, however, there was no increase in the number of preachers. Moreover, of the twenty-four preachers of 1602, fourteen had taken cures without a preaching 'tradition', while only ten of the parishes listed in 1586 had a preaching ministry 16 years later. The preaching ministry in thirteen parishes in 1586 was not sustained.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Peel, *Seconde Part*, vol II, p.173, compared with Cox, *Elizabethan Clergy List*, pp.175-180.

¹²⁰ Peel, p.174.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.165-174; Cox, *Elizabethan Clergy List*, pp.175-180.

The diocese was still failing to attract graduates, probably because of the low value of the livings. According to R.G.Usher, in 1603 Coventry and Lichfield had fewer graduates, proportionately, than any other diocese in England and Wales.⁹⁹ By 1620, 80% of all the incumbents in the diocese of Oxford had degrees. In 1600 31% of ministers in Bath and Wells were graduates.¹⁰⁰ In 1602, at Coventry and Lichfield, 110 out of 461 were lettered, 23.86% of the listed clergy within the diocese. Within the archdeaconry of Stafford a survey of 1593 had found that, out of 103 clergy, there were fourteen graduates, 13.6% of the total, although a further eleven had studied at university, without taking degrees.¹⁰¹ Added together these give a figure of 24.27%. In the 1602 survey the figures for Staffordshire show that out of a total of 91 clerics, twenty were graduates, 21.97%.¹⁰² These figures, and the evidence from the deaneries of Stoneley and Marten point to a diocese in which progress was painfully slow.

This is further corroborated by the Puritan Survey of Staffordshire in 1604. The Survey records the number of churches in the archdeaconry, the status and qualifications of the incumbents, and the extent of lay patronage and impropriations. Where the number of recusants was deemed significant, this was also noted. Compared with the Elizabethan Clergy List of 1602, the later register is larger and much more detailed. It catalogues 166 benefices as opposed to 99.¹⁰³ A comparison between the two lists also reveals a discrepancy between the numbers of preachers, fifteen in 1602 compared with forty-eight in 1604. Where the Elizabethan List does not refer to the spirituality and morals of incumbents, and the Puritan Survey of Warwickshire of 1586 comments indiscriminately on both the good and bad, the 1604 survey is silent on the merits of those clerics of whom it approves, and outspoken about those clergy of whom it disapproves.

⁹⁹ R.G.Usher, *Reconstruction of the English Church* (London, 1910), vol.1, pp.207,241.

¹⁰⁰ M.Stieg, *Laud's Laboratory* (East Brunswick, 1982), p.54.

¹⁰¹ Survey of 1593, quoted in *VCH*, vol 3, p.54, quoting from Lambeth Palace Libr., Diocesan return, C.M. xiii/37.

¹⁰² Cox, 'Elizabethan Clergy List', pp.157-180.

¹⁰³ Willis listed 189 churches and chapels in 1727.

Robert Aston, the vicar of Astonfield, a parish of 2,000 communicants, was described as ‘non-resident, pluritant’ (he was also vicar of Standon in the archdeaconry) and ‘a grievous swearer, whoremaster and drunkard, and very unlearned’.¹²⁶

The review of the church in Staffordshire was similar to the Puritan county surveys of the 1580s, of which a number were made. These had been criticised by Richard Bancroft in 1593. He had written, ‘this survey hath been made in most of the shires of England, as by the surveys to be showed, it appeareth. They are in the manner of heathenish libels’.¹²⁷ The 1604 list was certainly censorious, and probably contained some inaccuracies; nevertheless the information gives evidence of having been painstakingly and carefully recorded.¹²⁸ Again the impression received is of inadequate discipline at archidiaconal and episcopal level, and of the moral turpitude of many of the clergy. The aim of the survey was to draw attention to the lamentable state of the church in Staffordshire and no individual commendations were allowed to alleviate the bleakness of its description.

The survey records that forty-eight, just under 30%, out of the 166 clerics were preachers. The Puritans found eleven of the forty-eight to be unsatisfactory and a further ten to be non-resident. The remaining twenty-seven elicited no comment, presumably regarded as satisfactory. However, other aspects of the 1604 survey were less encouraging. There was evidence of a failure to discipline unsatisfactory preachers. Lawrence Thorley, ordained by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1583, was vicar of Grindon from 1586 to 1607.¹²⁹ The Puritans reported him to be of ‘scandalous life’. He had as curate at Oncoate, Ralph Salt, ‘a lewd young man without orders’, who ‘out of all good order weareth a feather

¹²⁶ Peel, ‘A Puritan Survey’, pp.338-352.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.339, from, R.Bancroft, *Dangerous Positions and Proceedings, Published and Practised within this Island of Britain, under the Pretence of Reformation, and for the Presbyterian Discipline* (London, 1593).

¹²⁸ Peel often corroborates the details regarding incumbents by providing dates and names.

¹²⁹ Peel, *A Puritan Survey*, p.352.

in his hat'. Thomas Lee, who was rector at Mucklestone and a preacher 'very infrequently', was 'offensive to the whole country'; nevertheless he managed to retain his benefice for over fifty years (1578-1630).

It was not only insufficient preachers who went uncorrected. The rector of Chebsay, Humphrey Whitmore, who was 'very famous for his skill in gaming and specially in bowling', held the benefice from 1573 until 1617. Official complaints had been made about William Smallwood, the curate of Marlbroke in the parish of Leek, to no apparent effect. He was 'a common drunkard, making unlawful marriages to the great hurt of the country' and 'tainted with other vile sins. Hath been complained of both to the Bishop and Chancellor, and yet is there still'.¹⁰⁸ There is evidence that even when leading figures in the diocese held local benefices, they still failed to discipline their parochial clerical insubordinates. William Hinton, the Archdeacon of Coventry was a pluralist, one of his livings being Weeford in Staffordshire. A non-resident, his curate, Thomas Hargrave, was described by the Puritans as 'of lewd life'. Bishop Overton himself was rector of Stoke-upon-Trent, a large parish consisting of 'twenty-five townships'. One of the chapels in the parish had as its curate 'a boy without orders', while at Norton le Moors, one of its annexed churches, the curate was Roger Teymley, 'a common drunkard, a common maker of unlawful marriages and tainted with other vile sins as all the country knows'.¹⁰⁹

One of Overton's aims had been to discourage Catholicism. According to the Survey it was still flourishing in parts of Staffordshire in 1604, especially in the peculiars of the Dean and Chapter. Cannock was described as containing 'almost all Papists, as is commonly seen in the jurisdiction of the Dean and Chapter'. This accords with Overton's earlier complaint that peculiars were havens for Catholics. Of the twenty-nine parishes where recusants were mentioned, eleven were under the patronage of the Dean and Chapter. However,

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.342.

¹⁰⁹ *Loc. cit.*

eighteen remained outside capitular jurisdiction, being under the bishop, again revealing the insufficiency of the authorities in dealing with the situation. The problem was further compounded in that amongst the twenty-nine parishes there were eleven preachers, a higher proportion than elsewhere in the archdeaconry or the diocese.¹³² Even parishes thus favoured were proving resistant to reformation. There is also evidence that Overton's attempts to regulate the clergy in the 1580s had also been unsuccessful. The new vicar of Careswell was instituted to the benefice in 1603, 'having been a gentleman's household servant many years ... very ignorant'.¹³³

Despite some Puritan exaggeration, the impression received from this survey, and from the survey of Warwickshire and the Elizabethan Clergy list, is that Overton (despite his stated reformed sympathies, his intellectual abilities and the zeal of his early years as Ordinary) had been unsuccessful in his attempts at reform. His alienation of influential groups and individuals, particularly those who were like-minded in the faith, both within and outside the diocese, hindered his effectiveness and deprived him of much needed support. For example, his predecessor, Thomas Bentham (1560-1579), had obtained relief from the obligation to pay first fruits, 'probably because of his influence at court'. Overton failed to obtain a similar remission because he had, at the time, fallen out with Cecil.¹³⁴ Such assistance would have made things easier for him, but would not have removed the main stumbling blocks to reformation. Despite the benefits of a less contentious personality, and some support from court, Bentham's effectiveness had been impeded by certain diocesan constants, which Overton inherited. The Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield possessed few advowsons in a diocese which was large and poor, and contained many peculiars. Under Overton, the see stagnated. Preachers were not attracted into the area in significant

¹³² 38% of the parishes in which there were significant numbers of recusants were served by preachers. Some of these preachers were non-resident and some did not preach often.

¹³³ A. Peel, *A Puritan Survey*, p.344.

¹³⁴ O'Day, 'Cumulative Debt', pp.82-83.

numbers, and some of those listed were either non-resident or unsatisfactory.

Diocesan discipline, for which the Bishop was responsible, was both lax and ineffective. Catholicism, at least in Staffordshire, was seemingly unchecked. The comment made by Whitgift at the commencement of Overton's episcopate could be applied equally twenty years later: Coventry and Lichfield remained a diocese 'in sundry parts ... out of frame'.

CHAPTER 2

Episcopal Leadership: the bishops of Coventry and Lichfield, 1609-1632

Between 1603 and 1632, the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield had five bishops, of whom only William Overton died in office. The other four were translated to more prestigious sees. This chapter attempts to determine the types of protestantism advanced by the bishops and looks at their efforts to secure its implementation, through a study of their visitation articles, comments by contemporaries, clerics, and their own works and actions. One of Overton's successors, George Abbot, served for only a brief period, and this chapter focuses on the work of Richard Neile, John Overall and Thomas Morton. It ends with an attempt to set the episcopal history of the diocese alongside national trends.

The period from the accession of James to 1609 marked the final six years of the episcopate of William Overton, by now in his late seventies and early eighties. He appears to have remained an active diocesan, diligent to the last year of his life.¹ Even in old age, Overton continued to encourage painful preaching. He granted licences to the Puritans Arthur Hildersham (of Ashby-de-la-Zouch) and William Bradshaw, both of whom had been suspended for non-subscription.² He also provided a temporary haven for John Dod, suspended from the diocese of Oxford, who was able to continue his ministry at Fenny Compton, Warwickshire, 'where he had but small means, but was desirous to be doing good'.³

¹ S.A.H.Bourne and D.Salt (eds.), 'Staffordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls, 1581-1609', in *CHS* (Kendall, 1931-1950), 6 vols.

² Samuel Clarke, *The Lives of Thirty-Two Divines* (London, 1677), pp.43, 116-17.

³ K.Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor* (Oxford, 1990), pp.325-6; S Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-Two Divines* (London, 1651), p.170. Fincham suggests that Dod and Hildersham managed to avoid subscription altogether.

Overton died in 1609, and was succeeded by the Dean of Winchester, George Abbot, who was appointed bishop in May 1609. His episcopate proved short-lived, however; he was translated to London, and enthroned at St. Paul's in February 1610.⁴

Bishop Richard Neile (1610-1614)

Abbot's successor at Coventry and Lichfield was Richard Neile, bishop of Rochester. The son of a tallow-chandler, Neile was born in Westminster in 1562 and educated at Westminster School. Like Overton, he had enjoyed the patronage of the Cecil family. He was sent to St. John's College, Cambridge by Mildred, Lady Burghley, and in 1589, Burghley made him his household chaplain, a position he later held under his son, Robert Cecil. He preached before Queen Elizabeth who was 'much taken with him'.⁵

In 1603 he was selected to be one of James's royal chaplains, also becoming Master of the Savoy and Clerk of the Closet in the same year, with responsibility for choosing the clerics who would preach before King James in the Chapel Royal.⁶ In 1605 Neile was made dean of Westminster, where he proved highly successful, putting the collegiate estates and accounts in order and repairing Henry VII's chapel.⁷

Neile soon won the King's affection, receiving many gifts and favours. He was entrusted with the reburial of Mary, Queen of Scots, at Westminster, and conducted the funerals of two of James's children.⁸ In 1608 he was elevated to the bishopric of Rochester, an appointment which enabled him to remain in the capital and did not clash 'with demands made upon his time as a royal favourite'.⁹

⁴ *DNB*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid*; Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.305.

⁷ E.Carpenter (ed.), *A House of Kings* (London, 1966), pp.144-47.

⁸ A.W.Foster, 'A Biography of Archbishop Richard Neile, (1562-1640)' (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1978), p.46

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.47.

Neile's advancement in these years owed much to the patronage of Robert Cecil and Richard Bancroft, who had succeeded Whitgift as primate in 1604.

Richard Neile was not formally elected to the vacant see of Coventry and Lichfield until October 1610. Foster suggests this was because the diocese was thought to be unsuitable for him. Though much larger than Rochester, it was neither wealthy nor prestigious and contained a significant recusant presence as well as pockets of Puritanism. After twenty-nine years under the contentious leadership of William Overton, it needed firm control, but, as Foster remarks, 'it was hardly an attractive proposition, and was certainly no great step up from Rochester'.¹⁰ He ascribes Neile's eventual translation to Coventry and Lichfield to Bancroft and Cecil who, faced with growing Calvinist opposition amongst the higher echelons of the church, sought to preserve the power of a group of like-minded clerics.¹¹ For some years, Neile had not aligned himself with the prevailing Calvinist consensus, believing it put a premium on preaching at the expense of liturgical and sacramental conformity, and sacrificed the uniformity of public worship to excessive evangelism.¹² After Neile's eventual departure, his disciple, the ritualist, John Buckeridge was nominated to succeed him at Rochester.¹³ Moving Neile 'sideways' made way for another anti-Calvinist on the episcopal bench.

The change involved Neile in some loss of income. At Rochester he received at least £550 per annum, drawn from his bishopric and deanery, while Coventry and Lichfield was valued at £560 in the King's Book, of which little

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.48.

¹¹ Bancroft died in 1610, and Cecil in 1612. Prior to Cecil's death his influence with the King had declined.

¹² P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982), pp.81-82; Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, pp.46-48. According to Fincham, it was during his time as bishop of Coventry and Lichfield that Neile gathered prominent anti-Calvinists around him, who, after 1617, became known as the Durham House Group. Amongst those associated with Neile's anti-Calvinism were Buckeridge of Rochester, William Laud, Lancelot Andrewes and John Overall.

¹³ Foster, 'Richard Neile', p.50. According to Fincham, Buckeridge believed that excessive preaching marred the Church, and deformed the proper conduct of worship. Maintaining that the eucharist was the supreme spiritual sacrifice of men to God, he also held that acceptable worship must include such outward gestures as kneeling and bowing. Buckeridge feared that the Reformation had substituted profanity for superstition. Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, pp.231-40.

more than £500 was ever paid in practice. In November 1610, to augment his income, he was issued with a grant from the dean and chapter of Canterbury, which provided that 'you may retain Southfleet rectory in Rochester diocese, and Firles prebend and the place of a residentiary in Chichester Cathedral so long as you hold the Bishopric'.¹⁴

Neile's translation did not require him to move from London. Holding the office of Clerk of the Closet, he continued to reside at court and used his position to influence the direction of ecclesiastical policy. As a court bishop he sat in the court of High Commission, took an active role in the House of Lords, and fulfilled the roles of ecclesiastical politician, judge and household officer to James.¹⁵ He became a close confidant of the King.¹⁶

By 1610, Neile's doctrinal stance had greatly altered from his earlier position. His doctoral thesis, defended in 1600, had refuted Catholic auricular confession and the tenet of limbo, revealing his alignment with the Cambridge Calvinists against John Overall, then Regius Professor of Divinity at the University.¹⁷ However, Nicholas Tyacke has suggested that Neile's ideas were already in a state of flux. He was in the process of emancipating himself from the effects of ten years in the 'ultra-Protestant' college of St. John's, and Overall was partly responsible for the change.¹⁸ Evidence of Neile's changing views can be found in 1606, in his endorsement for the press of two sermons by Richard Meredith, a chaplain to James, who had also served, like Neile, as a chaplain to

¹⁴ Foster, 'Richard Neile', p.50.

¹⁵ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, pp.41-53.

¹⁶ It is told that when painful preachers mounted the pulpit in the Chapel Royal, Neile would distract James's attention with entertaining stories, and that he ingratiated himself to the King by his engaging company and earthy humour. Unlike some of the other court prelates, Neile was a married man and once preached before the King on the text 'and what are women to you and me?' Foster, while admitting that Neile was neither an intellectual nor an eloquent preacher, questions the validity of the reports, made by Alexander Leighton and Arthur Wilson, of Neile's behaviour during sermon time. See Foster, 'Richard Neile', pp.38-39; *idem*, 'The Function of a Bishop: the career of Richard Neile, 1562-1640', in R.O'Day and F.Heal (eds.), *Continuity and Change: Personnel and Administration of the Church of England 1500-1642* (Leicester, 1979), pp.33-54.

¹⁷ DNB.

¹⁸ N.Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists* (Oxford, 1987), p. 111.

Robert Cecil. His first sermon was conventional, but Neile's endorsement of the second offers a significant clue.¹⁹

Meredith's second sermon was on the importance and efficacy of prayer, a theme he used as a rod with which to beat 'Puritans' and 'schismatics'. He confessed that he had 'magnified' prayer in order to 'diminish and abate the credit of a certain new-fangled and over-licentious opinion, which is of late conceived amongst men, to wit, that all the chief parts and points of the Christian religion consisteth in the reading of Scriptures, frequenting of lectures, and hearing of sermons'.²⁰ Sermons were not to be despised, but their place was after prayer. To a 'heady, giddy precise disciplinarian,' who believed that the edification of the Church was only to be had by listening to preaching, Meredith declared, 'I tell him that he hath as great a need of prayer to sanctify his soul and his body: let him come to church for that'. Church worship was the place where, 'unless he be too much of a Pluritant' (*sic*), a confession was to be made for his sins, and where, unless he was a schismatic, 'his consent is required here by saying Amen with the congregation assembled'. At the conclusion of the sermon, Meredith commented: 'what a strange cockatrice egg hath the madness of certain schismatics hatched among us, they will come forsooth to the church, but not to prayer? O how much impiety, O how much profaneness hath the liberty and licentiousness of our age brought forth'.²¹ Meredith's sermons manifested many of the concerns associated with English Arminianism. He extolled the role of the King as supreme governor of the Church, criticised the centrality of preaching in worship, caricatured Puritans, decried Elizabethan and Jacobean ecclesiastical laxity and encouraged conformity in worship. All were to be significant features of Neile's churchmanship.

¹⁹ *Two Sermons Preached before His Majesty in His Chapet at Whitehall, by Richard Meredith, One of His Majesty's Chaplains in Ordinary* (London, 1606), p. 10.

²⁰ Meredith, *Two Sermons*, p.40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.44.

Fincham has noted that Neile's patronage was generally bestowed on younger clergy who shared his hostility to Puritanism.²² On his nomination to Rochester, he appointed William Laud as his chaplain, on the recommendation of John Buckeridge.²³ (When Neile was translated to Lincoln in 1614, he made Laud prebend of Buckden and Archdeacon of Huntingdon). In 1611 Neile successfully defended Laud at court, in the face of Calvinist opposition, in his attempt to become president of St. John's College, Oxford.²⁴ By the time of Laud's appointment to the College, 'Neile was gathering around him a number of prominent anti-Calvinists who ... included Buckeridge ... and Laud, as well as Butler and Carier. On the fringes of this group were Lancelot Andrewes and John Overall'.²⁵

Neile rejected the dominant Calvinistic piety of the early Jacobean period. Suspicious of excessive preaching, he valued order and conformity in worship. In 1611, for example, he wrote to James, reporting that the mayor and aldermen of Coventry had refused to kneel when taking communion. James informed the offending corporation, by letter, of his strong disapproval.²⁶ In 1614, Neile fell foul of the Commons by defending James's prerogative over the issue of impositions and M.P.s seized the opportunity to criticise him, not only as a counsellor to the King but also in his office as a bishop. Nicholas Fuller, a London M.P., alleged 'that in his diocese he had dealt hardly with all his clergy, and raised a new tax upon them. That he had said to many ministers under him, that to preach twice on the Sabbath was the next way to hinder their preferment'.²⁷

²² Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.286.

²³ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 108. Buckeridge was responsible for introducing Neile to John Howson, later bishop of Oxford and Durham.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Andrewes was, by 1611, Bishop of Ely, and resided at court. His preaching was much favoured by James. Overall was to be Neile's successor at Coventry and Lichfield. Butler had preached on the subject of justification by faith at court in 1610, when his ministry had met with Bancroft's disapproval, the Archbishop describing it as 'pure popery'. Carier, a chaplain to Whitgift and James, became a Catholic in 1613.

²⁶ W.Dugdale, *The History and Antiquities of Warwickshire* (London, 1730), p.151.

²⁷ M.Jansson (ed.), *Proceedings in Parliament 1614 (House of Commons)*, (Philadelphia, 1988), p.370.

The statement was corroborated by a Coventry M.P., Alderman Sampson Hopkins, who maintained ‘that he could affirm what he had said to his clergy for their preaching twice a day; and that he had heard the Bishop say that for his part he never went to two sermons on a Sunday but he slept [in] one of them’. Hopkins repeated the charge that Neile had raised great taxes on his clergy. His other accusations, that Neile had cut down all the woods belonging to the bishopric and had taken fines and made leases in possession and reversion of all that he could which belonged to the see, are reminiscent of charges brought against his predecessor, William Overton.²⁸ Amongst the ‘godly’ in the diocese, Neile’s opposition to unregulated preaching was well known. In 1617, Edward Vaughan, the minister of Stretton-in-the-Field, Derbyshire, alluded to this when he dedicated a new edition of his *A Plain and Perfect Method for the Easy Understanding of the Whole Bible* to his Ordinary. Concluding his introductory remarks to John Overall, Vaughan wrote ‘heartily desiring the Lord of eternal life, that by your good means, we in these parts, and in your jurisdiction may have a more peaceable proceeding in our preaching, and that sincere professors thereof, may by you and such like, be more and more countenanced and comforted’.²⁹ According to Samuel Clarke, Richard Rothwell (1565-1627), the non-conformist, had ‘some contests with the Prelates, especially with Bishop Neal, then of Lichfield’. Neile’s zeal in this matter transcended diocesan boundaries. Having left Fenny Compton, John Dod continued to minister at Canons Ashby, in Northamptonshire. The Bishop complained to James about him, and the King ordered Archbishop Abbot to silence Dod.³⁰

As a court bishop, Neile’s recorded visits to his diocese were few: three separate occasions, all falling in 1611.³¹ On one of these, he was present at the

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.371.

²⁹ E. Vaughan, *A Plain and Perfect Method, for the easy understanding of the Whole Bible: containing 7 observations, dialoguewise, between the Parishioner and Pastor* (1617), Dedication. John Overall was bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, 1614-1618.

³⁰ Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-Two Divines*, pp.69,170; DNB; Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.226.

³¹ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.313.

heresy trial of Edward Wightman, which was held at Lichfield consistory court. Wightman, a draper from Burton-on-Trent, had written a short manuscript which he had delivered to the King. The extraordinary nature of its contents resulted in Wightman being charged with heretical depravity, and his case attracted considerable public interest.³² Amongst a number of heterodox statements, Wightman's writings contained a denial of the Trinity, including the divinity and work of Christ, and the accusation that the Apostles, Nicean and Athanasian creeds were Nicolaitan heresies.³³ Proclaiming himself to be both the Messianic Prophet and the Comforter, Wightman announced that he had been divinely commissioned to deliver the world from the Nicolaitan heresy.³⁴ On the fifth day of the trial, Neile asked him if he had answered 'advisedly, deliberately and freely of his own accord, without distraction of mind or any other distemperature'. Wightman refused to acknowledge his errors.³⁵ Before passing sentence Neile and others took turns to confute Wightman's heresies, after which he was pronounced guilty and handed over to the secular authorities. Wightman was brought to the stake at Lichfield on March 9th, 1612. Recanting after the fire was lighted, he later recanted his recantation and was burned at the stake the following April, 'blaspheming more audaciously than before'.³⁶

Wightman was the last man in England to be burned for heresy, and as such achieved a certain notoriety. By the mores of the time, Neile's handling of the case was in no way remarkable.³⁷ What was distinctive was the use Neile made of the affair in his dealings with Arthur Hildersham of Ashby-de-la-Zouch,

³² Bodleian Library, Ashmolean Ms. 1521 (vii).Nov. 19th., 26th., 29th., and Dec. 2nd., 3rd., 4th., and 5th.

³³ *Revelation*, ch.2, vv. 6, 15-16.

³⁴ B. Ashmolean Ms. 1521, pp.36-37, transcribed in C.Burridge, *The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (1550-1641)*(New York, 1912), vol.1, pp.218-19.

³⁵ B. Ashmolean Ms. 1521, pp.26-27.

³⁶ PRO, SP 16/432/27 iv; *DNB*.

³⁷ In 1612, Bishop Jigon of Norwich had written to Archbishop Abbot for advice in dealing with the heretic William Sayer, whom Jigon felt should be burned. Abbot deprecated such a course of action, unless Sayer persisted in his denial of the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, in which case 'the Law will take hold of him as it did last year upon Legate, and Wightman, to fry him at the stake'. Burridge, *Early English Dissenters*, pp.66-67.

which again revealed his distaste for lectures and painful preaching. Hildersham (1563-1632) had been one of the instigators of the preaching exercises held at Ashby, Repton and Burton at the turn of the century. Deprived in 1605 by his diocesan (Chaderton of Lincoln) for refusing to subscribe and non-conformity, 'after some time, by the connivance and favour of William Overton', he sometimes preached in the Coventry diocese, especially at the exercises at Burton and Repton. Wightman had attended the Burton lectures, and Neile accused Hildersham of teaching him heresy. Wightman himself claimed that Hildersham had taught the doctrine of soul sleep; Hildersham denied this, and was supported by the deposition of Albery, the minister at Burton. Nevertheless, Neile was not to be placated. He complained to James about Hildersham, and suppressed the lectures in 1611.³⁸ In 1613, Hildersham was suspended by High Commission.³⁹

The most important instrument available to any bishop to regulate, discipline and to stamp his own views on his diocese, was the triennial visitation. Neile issued Articles for his primary visitation in 1610.⁴⁰ They were derived from the 1598 articles that his patron, Richard Bancroft, had published as Bishop of London.⁴¹ A comparison between those of Bancroft and Neile, and William Overton reveals significant changes in emphases. Overton's 1584 set had prioritised the need to reform the ministry and discipline of the church, with the removal of the remnants of Catholic worship in the parishes, and the chastisement of Catholic recusants. It also evidenced some toleration of aspects of clerical non-

³⁸ Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-Two English Divines*, pp.117-18.

³⁹ Hildersham was prosecuted as a schismatic in 1616. Sentenced to be imprisoned, and fined £2,000, he compounded for the fine, escaping imprisonment by remaining concealed in Catherine Redich's house in Hamstead. The Redich's home was at New Hall, near Burton-on-Trent. They were co-religionists and close friends of Hildersham.

⁴⁰ R.Neile, *Articles to be enquired within the Diocese of Coventrie and Litchfielde, in the first Visitation of the Right reverend Father in God, Richard bishop of Coventrie and Litchfield* (London, 1610).

⁴¹ These Articles were also adapted by John Howson at Oxford (1619-1628), and by Richard Corbet, his successor, in 1629. The influence of Bancroft's 1598 set on those of Howson in 1619 was considerable; some articles from 1619 being almost identical. See K.Fincham (ed.), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church, I* (Woodbridge, 1994), pp. xvii-xviii, pp.189-199; R.Bancroft, *Articles to be enquired of within the Diocese of London, in the Visitation of the Reverend Father in God, Richard Bishop of London, in his first general Visitation* (London, 1598).

conformity.⁴² These characteristics were not found in the set of 1598 or in Neile's. While Overton had simply enquired if Common Prayer was 'distinctly and audibly read within the parish, and the Sacraments reverently and orderly administered', Neile repeatedly required that Prayer Book worship be carried out to the letter. Common Prayer was to be read 'distinctly and reverently on all Sundays and holy days, in such order as is set downe in the Book of Common Prayer, without any kind of alteration, or omission'. Separate items asked if the litany was read on Wednesdays and Fridays, and the question was repeated as to whether, at other services (for instance, Holy Communion and Baptism) the set forms and prayers were adhered to.⁴³ Neile's articles also displayed a concern for the faithful observance of the prescribed rites and ceremonies of worship. He enquired if the minister wore the surplice when reading Common Prayer, and whether he administered communion to 'none but to such as do kneele at the receiving thereof'. Answers in the negative might indicate Puritan sympathies on the part of the minister and congregation. Kneeling at Communion was a shibboleth amongst some Puritans, as Bradshaw's tract, *A Proposition of Kneeling in the Very Act of Receiving*, testifies.⁴⁴ Neile was anxious to root out clerical non-conformity. He asked whether any clergyman had publically or privately spoken either against the Prayer Book, or anything contained in it, by 'dispraising or depraning [*sic*] the same', or the 'present state of the ecclesiastical government ... affirming the same to be unlawful, Popish or antichristian'?⁴⁵ Overton's 1584 Articles had been silent on such issues. By 1610 his efforts to ensure an effective 'painful' ministry had been being superceded by a greater concern with order and reverence in worship.

⁴² See Chapter 1, pp.24-25.

⁴³ Overton, *Articles to be Inquired in the Ordinary Visitation*, item 2; Neile, *Articles*, 'concerning the clergy', nos. 2-4.

⁴⁴ William Bradshaw's *A Proposition of Kneeling* was published anonymously in Amsterdam in 1605. See Chapter 3.

⁴⁵ Neile, *Articles*, 'concerning the clergy', no.17.

A further change in emphasis can be seen in questions regarding the laity. While still seeking to detect Catholic recusancy, the Articles showed as great a concern to discipline Puritan and 'schismatic' practices. Information was required about parishioners who, because the local incumbent was not a preacher, refused to receive the elements of communion from his hands, or who took communion elsewhere, because their clergyman observed 'the order of administration appointed by the booke'.⁴⁶

Bancroft's influential London articles were forged in the aftermath of the Presbyterian crisis of the early 1590s, and evidence a marked change in content from some of the visitation articles which had been produced earlier in Elizabeth's reign. Overton's set of 1584 had privileged the Word-centred, pastoral ministry of Elizabethan Puritanism. By 1610, Neile's Articles for Coventry and Lichfield were more concerned to enforce the exact observance of the Prayer Book in word and action.

The responsibility for reporting the situation in the parishes lay with the local churchwardens, and the implementation of discipline was the responsibility of the ecclesiastical officers within the diocese. Their burden was all the greater because Neile, as a court bishop, did not reside in his see.⁴⁷ Fincham, however, contends that such bishops, by sitting in the consistory court and the court of audience, could exercise direct personal control over discipline. Neile was present at his primary visitation of 1611 and, in obedience to the King's command, also sat in Lichfield at the trial of the heretic Edward Wightman.⁴⁸ The trial affords an insight into part of Neile's practice as a diocesan, which was to conduct diocesan business in the vicinity of the court. James had originally sent Wightman to Neile at Westminster, where, over a six-month period, the Bishop held a succession of interviews with him. The meetings were ineffective, Wightman holding to his

⁴⁶ Neile, *Articles*, 'concerning the Parishioners', no.9.

⁴⁷ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.313. Absence of records, of course, does not mean that he did not visit his diocese in the other years of his episcopate. (1610-1614).

⁴⁸ See pp.56-57.

beliefs ever more tenaciously. It was on James's order that he was sent down to Lichfield, to be followed by Neile, who was to proceed against him as an obstinate heretic.⁴⁹ Another facet of Neile's practice as a court bishop was his recourse to James over disciplinary problems, which ensured a more sympathetic hearing than he would have received from the Calvinist Archbishop Abbot. This can be seen in the instances of the non-conformist preachers, John Dod and Arthur Hildersham, who were both silenced by the King's direction. Abbot held their preaching gifts in greater respect; within months of James's death in 1625, he reinstated them to the preaching ministry.⁵⁰ In 1611, when Neile reported to James that the mayor and corporation of Coventry refused to kneel at communion, the King informed the city that 'we find in our Servant your Bishop a desire to effect this by good means and gentle persuasion rather than by legal proceedings against any'. Foster comments that this was 'surely a classic case of Neile hiding behind the authority of the King when faced with strong opponents?''⁵¹ In all three cases, the Bishop got his way.

In Neile's absence from the diocese, local control was facilitated by a hand-picked team of diocesan officials. When he became bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, Neile brought with him William Easdel, the legal secretary he had acquired at Westminster. As early as June 1610, approximately six months before his translation to the see, he had sent Easdel to survey all the episcopal lands within the diocese.⁵² On Neile's later translation to Lincoln, Easdel was to move with him; as was another of his protégés, William Laud. Laud had become a chaplain to Neile in 1608, when the latter had been elevated to Rochester. He was at Neile's side throughout the Wightman affair.⁵³ In 1613, Thomas Masters, the Bishop's former chancellor, joined him at Lichfield. Masters became Archdeacon

⁴⁹ SP 16/432/27 iv.

⁵⁰ See above, pp.55,57; Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.226.

⁵¹ See above, p.54; A.Foster, 'Archbishop Richard Neile Revisited', in P.Lake and M. Questier, *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c.1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp.159-178.

⁵² Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.239.

⁵³ Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, p.218.

of Salop after the previous incumbent, Valentine Carey, had been made Dean of St. Paul's. Robert Masters, brother to Thomas, was also induced to join Neile in the Midlands.⁵⁴ Foster argues that 'Neile's careful selection of able subordinates released him from many routine tasks which faced a bishop, and enabled him to concentrate on more important matters. Yet personal control was always present. He checked accounts, ordered surveys and kept strict records of all reforms and business transactions'.⁵⁵

Neile trusted his deputies, installed a team he could rely on, and was able, in a measure, to keep his finger on the pulse of diocesan life to ensure a well-ordered see. Unlike some of his Calvinistic peers, he emphasised discipline and conformity at the expense of the preaching ministry, which he sought to restrict and regulate. Some bishops, such as Overton and Morton, attempted to find suitable men, gifted expositors of the word, to take on poorly-paid charges in an ecclesiastical back-water. Neile, however, concentrated on suspending those suspected of non-conformity. Removing preachers required far less effort than providing them. In the period 1608-1640, Neile ordained only 108 deacons and priests, including nine as Archbishop of York. His record of licensing preachers was even less impressive. In his 32 years as a bishop, he only licensed thirty. This compared with eighty-seven licences, granted in 8 years, by his predecessor at York, Toby Matthew, and forty-nine in 22 years by William Overton, at Coventry and Lichfield.⁵⁶ Neile saw himself as a gentle ruler of his clergy, and later claimed that he had 'never deprived any man, but ... endeavoured their reformation with meekness and with patience'.⁵⁷ Such a view remains questionable. His insistence on conformity and obedience, and his lack of

⁵⁴ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.163. Fincham has this information from Foster's 'Archbishop Richard Neile', pp.60-61, 63. He writes that the archdeaconry was given to Robert Masters, but this is at odds with Browne Willis's records of 1727 which show Thomas Master (sic) as successor to Carey. Masters was himself succeeded as archdeacon by William Jeffrey in 1628.

⁵⁵ Foster, 'The Function of a Bishop', in O'Day and Heal, *Continuity and Change*, p. 48. For example, Foster writes that the 'Dean's Book' at Westminster catalogues his work in property restoration, in increasing the revenues and in improving the leases.

⁵⁶ Foster, 'Archbishop Neile Revisited', p.172.

⁵⁷ *DNB*.

enthusiasm for preaching, marked him out from his Calvinistic peers on the episcopal bench. William Bradshaw, the Puritan, was filled with foreboding at the prospect of Neile's appointment, declaring he was the bishop most likely to create mischief for the Puritan cause. Such fears were not ill-founded, as Neile's subsequent dealings with Hildersham, Rothwell and Dod testify.⁵⁸ Neile's boast, when at York, was that he had never deprived any cleric. As Foster observes, the claim was somewhat disingenuous for his practice was to suspend rather than deprive, and there were several clergymen, later in his career, 'who felt that after long and earnest talks with Neile they would rather flee the country for the New World!'⁵⁹

Bishop John Overall (1614-1618)

When Richard Neile was translated to the diocese of Lincoln in 1614, his successor at Coventry and Lichfield was the dean of St. Paul's, John Overall. Born in 1560, Overall had entered St. John's College, Cambridge in 1575, received his M.A. in 1582, and taken orders in 1592.⁶⁰

After the death of the Calvinist William Whittaker, Overall succeeded him as Regius Professor of Theology at the University. He was soon involved in theological controversy, which would probably have prevented his appointment to the mastership of St. Catherine's Hall in 1598 but for the support of Queen Elizabeth and Archbishop Whitgift. In 1602 he was consecrated dean of St. Paul's. After the Hampton Court Conference of 1604 he was entrusted with the responsibility for the enlargement of the Prayer Book catechism, and he was later involved in the revision of the Bible, published in 1611.⁶¹

⁵⁸ S. Clarke, *A General Martyrologie* (London, 1660), pp. 61-62, 144-56, 199-212; Foster, 'Archbishop Neile Revisited', p. 162.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁶⁰ *DNB*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* He was one of ten scholars responsible for the revision of the Old Testament books from Genesis to 2 Kings.

Theologically, Overall was in the vanguard of English Arminianism. As early as 1595 (along with Peter Baro, the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, and Lancelot Andrewes) he had supported William Barrett, the chaplain of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge in his contention that the Calvinist exegesis of election, justifying faith and Christian assurance entailed 'a desperate presumption'.⁶² In 1596, Baro defied the Calvinistic Lambeth Articles which had recently received Whitgift's approval, by preaching that Christ had died for the sins of the whole world and that it was possible to resist grace.⁶³ In the ensuing controversy, Overall sided with Baro and was denounced by the Puritan, William Perkins. Overall was involved in other controversies on such subjects as justification and Roman Catholicism.⁶⁴ His views on Catholicism were shaped by his concern to defend the integrity and succession of the Church of England, and to stress the orderly nature of the separation with Rome. He denied that the Pope alone was the Antichrist, maintaining, in 1599, that the relevant scriptures might as easily refer to Mohammed and the Turks, and that the Pope and the Turk jointly constituted 'that Antichrist' prophesied in the Bible.⁶⁵ Regarding the early Church Fathers as more authoritative guides to biblical interpretation than the work of recent Protestant divines, he was wary of the veneration in which some contemporaries held the Reformers. According to Richard Dyott, the Arminian M.P. for Lichfield in the parliaments of the 1620s, when Calvin's *Institutes* were cited before Overall in disputation, the Bishop would reply, 'why cite you Calvin? I have studied divinity many more years than he was years of age when he wrote his *Institutes*'.⁶⁶

Though a controversial figure, Overall was strongly supported by the King. At Hampton Court in 1604, Overall had been commended by James when

⁶² H.C.Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1958), p.323.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.386.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.399, 403, 404.

⁶⁵ A.Milton, *Catholic and Reformed* (Cambridge, 1995), p.111. For Overall's views on Catholicism, see also *ibid.*, pp. 49, 83,133,136.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.274; Tyake, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.142.

he reiterated his views on justification.⁶⁷ According to John Cosin (who became his librarian at Coventry and Lichfield in 1616, and later his secretary, moving to Norwich with him), Overall was given the task of enlarging the catechism as a result of the arguments that the Puritan John Rainolds put forward at the conference. Some years later, when Archbishop de Dominis's works were being studied with interest, James recommended that whatever the Archbishop wrote, 'he should first communicate it in sheets and chapters one after another to the Bishop (Overall); whose approbation his Majesty would trust before all others'.⁶⁸

The esteem in which Overall was held by particular contemporary theologians reflects his own leanings and influence. He was the most active supporter of the Dutch Arminians on the episcopal bench, and the only bishop who continued to defend them up to the commencement of the Synod of Dort in 1618.⁶⁹ Overall was one of the Anglican bishops whom Oldenbarneveltdt, the chief lay supporter of Dutch Arminianism, recommended to his London ambassador to be sent to Holland to help resolve the Dutch religious crisis.⁷⁰ Richard Montagu, the anti-Calvinist author of *A New Gagg for an old Goose* (1624) and *Appello Caesarem* (1625), referred to Overall as 'that learned Prelate and most accomplished Divine (whose memory shall ever be precious with all good and learned men) the late Bishop of Norwich, Dr. Overall'.⁷¹ Calvinists saw Overall in a very different light. Writing of his tenure of the Regius Chair of Divinity at Cambridge, George Abbot maintained that 'he did infect as many as he

⁶⁷ Porter, *Reformation and Reaction*, p.406.

⁶⁸ Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, p.360, fn.155.

⁶⁹ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp. 89,91,120. Overall's concept of church unity was, however, grounded on a sacerdotal understanding of the ministry. Although he was sympathetic to the Dutch Remonstrants, and a supportive and frequent correspondent with Hugo Grotius, the Dutch anti-Calvinist, he nevertheless informed him that Lancelot Andrewes and others would object to his (Grotius's) granting definitive judgment in matters of faith to lay powers, as this denied the true authority and power of the clergy, and, in effect, made episcopacy unnecessary.

⁷⁰ The others were Richard Neile and John Buckeridge of Rochester.

⁷¹ R. Montagu, *Appello Caesarem* (London, 1625), p.31. *A New Gagg* (London, 1624) denied the credal Calvinism of the English Church; absolute predestination and unconditional perseverance were but 'private opinions'. Montagu rejected the Synod of Dort, and suggested that the English participants had 'prejudiced episcopacy in favour of Presbyterianism'. See Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.47.

could, till by sharp rebuke and reproofs he was beat from the public avowing of those fancies'.⁷² It is clear that Overall's theology divided his peers, revealing (and deepening) fissures within the Church.

How far were his theology and ecclesiology reflected within the diocese? Fincham has observed that 'for anti-Calvinist bishops chafing at the broad accommodation of Puritan piety within the Jacobean Church, their articles of visitation, denouncing non-conformity, profanity and irreverence, were irresistible opportunities to publish their opinions and offer manifestoes for change'.⁷³ The only extant Visitation Articles by Overall are those for the see of Norwich of 1619, and represent his mature opinions about a well-regulated diocese. As he was translated from Lichfield in 1618, it is reasonable to assume that most of the views contained in the 1619 Articles would have been very similar to those he held as bishop of Coventry and Lichfield (1614-1618), and that his articles published in 1614 and 1617, no longer extant, would have had a marked resemblance.

Overall's Norwich articles showed an even greater concern with the conduct of public worship than those by Bancroft and Neile.⁷⁴ Neile asked of the minister 'generally whether doth he in the discharge of all these duties, and when he readeth Common Prayer ... wear a surplice?' Overall was still more particular and precise, enquiring 'whether doth your minister always, and at every time both morning and evening, reading divine service, and administering the sacraments, and other rites of the Church, wear a surplice according to the canons, and doth he never omit wearing of the same at such times'.⁷⁵ Overall's enquiries as to the conduct of the laity were also more detailed, asking, for example, about those 'who do cover their heads in the Church, during the whole time of divine

⁷² Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.37.

⁷³ Fincham, *Visitation Articles*, I, p.xxiii.

⁷⁴ Fincham holds that Overall's set at Norwich influenced at least another twenty sets of Visitation Articles in the following two decades, and was a significant departure from previous sets, due to its contents and concerns. He maintains that those for Norwich in 1619 became a 'flagship amongst anti-Calvinist articles', *Ibid.*, p.xviii, xx.

⁷⁵ Neile, *Articles*, 'concerning the clergy', no.4; Fincham, *Visitation Articles*, 'Bishop Overall's Articles for Norwich Diocese,' 1619, Continual Wearing of the Surplice, p. 162.

service'.⁷⁶ He also charged churchwardens to report all those who failed to use 'all duly and lowly reverence when the blessed Name of the Lord Jesus is mentioned'.⁷⁷

One of Overall's articles asked whether the minister 'before the several times of the administration of the Lord's supper', admonished and exhorted his parishioners to private confession if troubled by their consciences, in order that the burdened soul 'may receive such ghostly counsel and comfort, that his conscience may be relieved, and by the minister he may receive the benefit of absolution, to the quiet of his conscience, and avoiding of the scruple...'.⁷⁸ Fincham notes the question about the availability of parochial auricular confession (subsequently adopted by a number of bishops, including Neile) as 'a clause without precedent in Jacobean articles'.⁷⁹ Overall had upheld the validity of confession, not tainted by Romanism, before Neile at the Cambridge Commencement of 1600, and the practice was recommended in the Book of Common Prayer, in the exhortation commanded to be read to the congregation on the Sunday or holy day prior to the celebration of communion.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the practice had been ignored for two or three generations, and its revival struck contemporaries as an innovation. Overall's article was a faithful reiteration of the Prayer Book exhortation, a number of phrases being identical. Its circumspect introduction into his visitation articles goes some way to support Fuller's description of Overall as a 'discreet presser of conformity'.⁸¹ It may also be an

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.166... 'unless it be in case of necessity, in which case they may wear a nightcap'.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.165.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.164.

⁷⁹ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.238.

⁸⁰ See above, p. 52. The minister was to read that because no man should participate in the Communion without faith in the mercy of God and a quiet conscience, 'if any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort and counsel, let him come to me, or to some other learned minister of God's word, and open his grief; that by the ministry of God's holy Word, he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice to the quieting of his conscience, and avoid all scruples and doubtfulness', 'The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion', in *Book of Common Prayer*; Fincham, *Visitation Articles*, Overall's article 'Ministers Revealing Private Confessions', p.164.

⁸¹ T.Fuller, *A History of the Worthies of England* (London, 1662), p.61.

indication that Overall was more careful and tactful in the implementation of some of his beliefs at diocesan level than he had been in his theological skirmishes at Cambridge.

Fincham has suggested that visitation articles were opportunities for Arminian bishops to publish their opinions rather than a 'practical agenda to be enforced then and there in the courts'.⁸² In the section relating to the preaching of the Word, Overall asked churchwardens whether their minister preached false doctrines and new opinions, or if he taught anything 'but that which is agreeable to the Scriptures, and that which the catholic fathers and ancient bishops have gathered out of that doctrine, according to the canon'.⁸³ This may reveal too high an opinion of the capabilities of parochial lay officers. Churchwardens of a dilapidated church who could on occasions return a set of articles marked with the ubiquitous '*omnia bene*' were hardly going to trouble themselves with doctrinal problems which taxed the ablest of contemporary theologians; nevertheless it gave them an opportunity to report any outrageous ideas that had come from the pulpit, and, more importantly, placed them under an obligation not to cover up such matters.

Like Neile before him, Overall did not reside in his diocese. He was a court bishop, living in London, although he had no major offices to keep him there.⁸⁴ He sat on High Commission and held regular diocesan ordination services in the capital.⁸⁵ He was present at Lambeth, with Archbishop Abbot and others, at the consecrations of Felton of Bristol and Montaigne of Lincoln in December 1617.⁸⁶

Ascertaining the efficacy of Overall's pastoral care of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield is problematic. His visitation articles are not extant, and

⁸² Fincham, *Visitation Articles*, vol. 1, p.xxiii.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.162.

⁸⁴ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.43.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁸⁶ J.E.McClure (ed.), *Letters of John Chamberlain* (Philadelphia, 1939), p.121. Other bishops present at the laying-on of hands were Andrewes of Ely, King of London, Buckeridge of Rochester and de Dominis, the Archbishop of Spalato.

Fincham has remarked that the paucity of surviving records means that his diocesan government (like that of some others) must remain a closed book.⁸⁷ The view that court bishops could keep close control through their trusted officials is hard to confirm, and there remained the problem of keeping control over the officials themselves. One example of sharp practice, in blatant opposition to the articles, can be found by the Bishop's affectionate disciple, John Cosin. Cosin owed his position as Overall's librarian to the patronage of John Hayward, a prebendary at Lichfield, who was nephew to the Bishop.⁸⁸ In 1619 Cosin corresponded with Richard Baddeley, secretary to Thomas Morton, Overall's successor at Coventry and Lichfield, about the procedure Baddeley should follow at the time of episcopal visitations. He should sit with the registrar and demand that the clergy produce their licenses. 'One secret I will tell you, which I must entreat you to make a secret still: 6d. a piece you may demand of every one of them, either licensed or not, for the exhibition of their license, and keep the profit to your self, howsoever the Register(*sic*) may perhaps challenge it. But I'll assure you they never yet had it ... I was the first with Mr. Nickins that set it afoot ... and therefore you may the more securely demand it'.⁸⁹ This example of uncontested sharp practice is contrary to instructions contained in various sets of Jacobean articles, all of which condemn the extraction of extraordinary fees by any official

⁸⁷ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.279. For instance, the only extant Bishop's Register in the period 1579-1661 is that of Thomas Morton (1619-1632), Lichfield Joint Record Office B/A/1/16. It comprises of 86 folios of institutions, followed by sixteen pages of ordinations for the period 1623-1631. On the flyleaf of the register of Bishop Hacket (1661-1670) it is written of the registers of Richard Wright (1632-1643) and Accepted Frewen ('1644-1660') 'desunt omnia'. LJRO, B/A/1/17.

⁸⁸ G. Ornsby (ed.), *Correspondence of John Cosin* (Durham, 1868), part 1, pp.299-300. In his will (1669), Cosin testified to Hayward's children 'of my gratitude to their deceased father who in my younger age first placed me with his uncle, Bishop Overall, a prelate of ever honoured memory'. Sampson records that, in 1616, Cosin was invited to London by both Andrewes and Overall to take care of their libraries. On the advice of his tutor he chose to work for Overall, who made him his secretary, and committed to him the care of his episcopal seal. J. Sampson (ed.), *The Works of the Right Reverend Father in God, John Cosin* (London, 1851), p.470.

⁸⁹ Ornsby, *Correspondence of John Cosin*, Mickleton Mss., vii 63. In the same letter Cosin informed Baddeley, 'The book of Articles will be challenged by the Register, but I hope you'll be wise enough to deny them. Collect the money yourself, else you may have some of it detained as we had at first. They are 12d. a piece'.

exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction within a diocese.⁹⁰ More positive testimony to Overall's tenure as Bishop of the diocese is found in a later comment from Richard Baddeley. Baddeley declared that his master did not face as many problems at Coventry and Lichfield as he had encountered at Chester, 'because the common sort of people for the most part were better principled by the care and vigilancy of his predecessor'.⁹¹

In 1618, Overall was translated to fill the vacant see of Norwich and was succeeded by the Bishop of Chester, Dr. Thomas Morton, a Calvinist, far more sympathetic to the Puritans than his immediate predecessors, and a prolific anti-Catholic polemicist. It marked a dramatic reversal in the episcopal government of the diocese.

Bishop Thomas Morton (1619-1632)

The son of a wealthy York mercer, Thomas Morton was born in 1564. Educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, Morton received his M.A. in 1590, and two years later was appointed university lecturer in logic and ordained to the ministry. A chaplain to Lord Huntingdon, the Lord President of the North, Morton acquired some local fame through his disputations with Catholics.⁹² In 1602, when Lord Eure was sent as an ambassador extraordinary to the German Emperor and the King of Denmark, Morton was one of his entourage, and used the occasion to make the acquaintance of foreign scholars, both Protestant and Catholic.⁹³

⁹⁰ Fincham, *Visitation Articles*, I pp.32,192, 167-168. See, for example, the articles of Bishops Richard Vaughan, London, 1605, 3.6; John Howson, Oxford, 1619, 3.2; John Overall, Norwich, 9.1. Cosin and Baddeley served masters who differed considerably in their theology. This did not prevent candid correspondence between their secretaries about extra financial perks that they might gain, during the performance of their duties.

⁹¹ J.Barwick, *IEPONIKHE, or The Fight, Victory and Triumph of St. Paul accommodated to ... Thomas, late Lord Bishop of Durham* (London,1660), p.88.

⁹² *DNB*.

⁹³ *Ibid*.

His first major work, the *Apologia Catholica* (1605), dedicated to Archbishop Bancroft, was a response to Brereley's *Apology of the Roman Church* (1604).⁹⁴ In it, he defended the English Church against Roman criticisms, and refuted the Catholic doctrine of equivocation.⁹⁵ Brereley had used selective extracts from the writings of reformed authors to gainsay their arguments, and had attempted to establish Roman Catholic claims through the testimonies of learned Protestants. Morton responded with an identical methodology, which was to become a hallmark of his polemics. Catholic writers were, in their turn, selectively utilised to provide unwitting testimonies to reformed doctrine, and to contradict each other.⁹⁶ Further polemical works followed, and Morton was to continue to engage in controversy with the Church of Rome until the 1640's, by which time he was in his mid-eighties.⁹⁷

In 1606 Morton was made a chaplain to James, received his D.D. from Cambridge, and was appointed Dean of Gloucester. In 1609, after Abbot's elevation to Coventry and Lichfield, Morton succeeded him as Dean of Winchester.

Morton was a Calvinist, tolerant of Puritans, 'in many ways a typical example of the kind of churchmanship common during King James's reign'.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, in a period of increasing theological polarisation within the English Church, he managed to maintain close friendships with churchmen on either side

⁹⁴ T. Morton, *Apologia Catholica, ex meris Jesuitarum contradictionibus conflata*. Parts One and Two (London, 1605-6).

⁹⁵ P. Milward, *Religious Controversies of the Jacobean Age* (London, 1978), pp. 151-153. Milward comments that Brereley was the pseudonym of a seminary priest whose identity is not certain. The author may have been Lawrence Anderton.

⁹⁶ Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, p. 233.

⁹⁷ See, for instance, his *An Exact Discovery of Romish Doctrine in the Case of Conspiracy and Rebellion, by pregnant observations* (1605); Milward, *Religious Controversies*, pp. 82-85. Morton's publication met with an anonymous Catholic reply, *A Just and Moderate Answer to a most injurious and Slandorous Pamphlet* (1606). In 1606, in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot and the equivocation controversy, Morton produced *A Full Satisfaction concerning a Double Romish Iniquity; heinous Rebellion and more than heathenish equivocation*. The book elicited a response from the Catholic polemicist, Robert Persons, entitled: *A Treatise Tending to Mitigation towards Catholic Subjects in England* (1607), and Morton's contention with Persons was only ended by the latter's death.

⁹⁸ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p. 171.

of the widening theological divide. In 1606, Morton's D.D. Acts and Exercises had won the approval of the Regius Professor of Divinity, John Overall, and despite their theological differences, they remained friends until Overall's death in 1619.⁹⁹ According to his biographer, John Barwick, Morton's translation to Coventry and Lichfield from the diocese of Chester was due, in part, to 'the motion of Dr. Andrews, then of Ely', whose recommendation was without Morton's 'seeking or knowledge, that he might have him his near neighbour, as he said, and of the same province as himself'.¹⁰⁰ Morton was also on close terms with Calvinists such as Daniel Featley, Arthur Lake, bishop of Bath and Wells (1616-1626) and John King, bishop of London (1611-1621), being chosen by King to perform the last offices for him, both at his death and burial. He was also held in high esteem by continental Calvinist scholars, amongst whom were Scultetus and John Diodati, (professors of theology at Heidelberg and Geneva respectively) and by Sibrandus Lubbertus, professor of divinity at the academy of Franeker, in West Friesland. Lubbertus exchanged letters on anti-papal strategy with Morton, and dedicated his *Replicato de Papa Romano* to him.¹⁰¹

In 1615, Morton was nominated to the bishopric of Chester. The diocese was noted for the relatively high incidence of Catholicism, and attempts to implement sabbatarianism within the see caused widespread resentment. James was made aware of this in 1617 when, returning south from a visit to Scotland, he passed through Lancashire and received an appeal on behalf of those who felt that they had been unfairly deprived of their Sunday pastimes.¹⁰² As a result, the

⁹⁹ Barwick, *A Summary Account*, p.69.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.84.

¹⁰¹ Milton, *Catholic and Reformed*, p.398. Milton writes that Calvinist scholars kept in contact throughout Europe, through participation in the 'republic of letters'. 'At its broadest ... (the) community was non-denominational ... and shared academic concerns could bridge (in a personal sense) yawning confessional chasms. Scholars of doubtful Calvinistic allegiance, such as ... Vossius and ... Casaubon could still command a general respect among their Calvinist colleagues for their outstanding academic abilities and personal affability'.

¹⁰² On his journey through the county, James took the opportunity to 'rebuke some of the Puritans and precise people' and ordered that in the future 'the like unlawful carriage should not be used hereafter, in the prohibiting and unlawful punishing of our good people for the using of lawful exercise upon Sundays and holy days, after the afternoon sermon or service'. See D.Cressy and L.A.Ferrell (eds.), *Religion and Society in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), p.146.

Declaration of Sports was issued in Lancashire in the same year, legalising most games and activities as long as they took place after Evening Prayer. Morton was responsible for most of the conditions and limitations of the Declaration, which upheld the mandate to attend parochial worship. Barwick later maintained that, because pastimes were permitted only to those who had attended worship, the proclamation was the likeliest inducement to bring people to church and ‘consequently to stop the current of popery and profaneness, by allowing them a small latitude for innocent recreations thus limited and bounded’.¹⁰³ The Lancashire Declaration met with some success, and James was to certify on a later journey through the county that ‘we find both by the report of the judges, and of the Bishop of that diocese that there is some amendment now beginning, which is no small content to us’.¹⁰⁴ Morton’s contribution to the Declaration suggests rather that he was prepared sometimes to be more pragmatic than doctrinaire in his attempt to find a solution to a pressing local problem.¹⁰⁵

One of the most striking features of Morton’s episcopate in Chester was his ‘emphasis on the reconciliation of Puritans and other opponents, as a preferred alternative to forceful suppression’.¹⁰⁶ He held a conference with non-conformist ministers, his purpose being to ‘confer with them publicly, to reduce them to conformity to the Church of England’.¹⁰⁷ There were three disputed issues: the use of the cross in baptism, kneeling to receive communion, and the surplice. Morton failed to persuade them to conform and the conference met with royal disapproval. According to John Paget, a local non-conformist minister, James felt that the Bishop had been too indulgent in his handling of the situation and that ‘his

¹⁰³ Barwick, *A Summary Account*, p.83.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.81.

¹⁰⁵ K.L.Parker, *The English Sabbath* (Cambridge, 1988), pp.149-54; J.Tait, ‘The Declaration of Sports for Lancashire’, *English Historical Review*, 32 (1917), pp561-68.

¹⁰⁶ Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, p.89.

¹⁰⁷ R.Baddeley and J.Nayler, *The Life of Dr. Thomas Morton, late Bishop of Duresme* (York, 1669), p.57.

remiss course with us had been prejudicial to his preferment to Lincoln'.¹⁰⁸ In 1618 Morton published a book which utilised some of the arguments he had used at the conference in answer to the cavils of his opponents.¹⁰⁹ Countering the non-conformists' argument that by not participating in the disputed ceremonies they were avoiding all appearance of evil (i.e. the ceremonies had Catholic connotations which might lead those weak in the faith astray, to the detriment of their souls), Morton maintained that such opposition to the ceremonies was both a show and appearance of evil, and an apparent and public evil in itself. Non-participation was disobedience to the Ordinary, and, in effect, ascribed more authority to a local minister than to a bishop acting by the lawful authority of a national synod. Such defiance distracted men's minds, and drew them into schism.

In 1619, partly on the recommendation of Lancelot Andrewes, Morton was translated to Coventry and Lichfield. He was the first bishop to live in the diocese since William Overton, residing at Eccleshall Castle and the episcopal palace at Lichfield. A bachelor with frugal personal habits, he nonetheless gained a reputation for his 'free hospitality and his continual relieving of the poor'.¹¹⁰ Morton occupied his time in preaching, writing books, debating with recusants and catechising his own household.¹¹¹ He was a firm supporter of catechising. His Visitation Articles of 1620 enquired, 'whether any of your parishioners, being admonished thereof, do not send their children, servants and apprentices to the

¹⁰⁸ J. Paget, *A Defence of Church Government, exercised in Presbyterial, Classical and Synodal Assemblies* (London, 1641), intro. After telling Paget this, Morton angrily threatened to suspend, excommunicate, degrade and 'make the land too hot' for him. Following an 'altercation', Morton dismissed him 'at that time without any censure, save of paying large fees to officers of the court, towards payment whereof he gave ten shillings'.

¹⁰⁹ T. Morton, *A Defence of the Innocency of the Three Ceremonies of the Church of England* (London, 1618).

¹¹⁰ Baddeley, *Life of Dr. Morton*, p.76. The accounts of Morton's life by Baddeley and Barwick are hagiographical. Of his hospitality to the poor, Baddeley echoes Paul's wording regarding the resurrection of Christ (I Cor. ch.15) when he writes, 'let them testify who were eye-witnesses, some of whom have died and perhaps, some are still alive'.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp75-76.

minister to be catechised upon such Sundays and holy days as are appointed'.¹¹² Morton had large quantities of catechisms (in the form prescribed by the Prayer Book) printed at his own expense, and distributed to every parish, exhorting his clergy to be dutiful and diligent catechisers.¹¹³

The Bishop's eagerness to promote preaching within his diocese is illustrated by his handling of a dispute between Samuel Buggs and the Corporation of Coventry. In July 1632, just before his translation to Durham, Morton wrote to Buggs (who held both Coventry livings of St Michael's and Holy Trinity), in response to a petition from the mayor and corporation and 'other inhabitants'.¹¹⁴ They had asked the Bishop's permission to choose a suitable preacher to minister to them twice a week at St. Michael's, and had informed Buggs that if the project did not meet with his favour, they were prepared to pay for the clergyman themselves. Morton expressed his approval, and asked Buggs to comply with their request. If he refused and the Bishop was dissatisfied with the reasons, Morton would accede to the wishes of the people, 'and accordingly, by some public instrument establish it, as I think I am bound in conscience in this case'. Morton had heard reports that Buggs intended to 'take some privilege from your doctorship to remit your former pains in preaching, and care of sufficient supply by others in your absence', and commented sharply that he 'conceive[d] better of him', and ordered him not to do so.¹¹⁵ His letter shows Morton as a determined supporter of preaching, and a more forceful diocesan than might appear from the two contemporary accounts of his life.

Morton's concern to promote preaching can also be seen in the case of Anthony Lapthorne. In the mid-1620s, Lapthorne was commended to Morton by the Earl of Pembroke, despite a history of non-conformity and subsequent ejection

¹¹² K.Fincham, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the early Stuart Church* (Woodbridge, 1998), vol. 2, pp.105(2), 114. Morton's 1620 articles were derived, almost word for word from Archbishop Abbot's 1612 Metropolitan Articles for Gloucester.

¹¹³ Baddeley, *Life of Morton*, pp.89-90. This was also his practice at Chester, and later at Durham.

¹¹⁴ Buggs became vicar of St. Michael's in 1623, and of Holy Trinity in 1626. He then held both livings until his death in 1633.

¹¹⁵ SP 16/218/77.

which spanned twenty years. According to his biographer, he 'had that hard portion from the bishops to be ejected for his inconformity out of one half of the dioceses of England'.¹¹⁶ Morton 'reduced him to conformity', before placing him at Cannock, 'the most prophane and barbarous parish within [the] diocese'. Lapthorne's painful ministry there bore fruit: 'he brought them to be as religious and orderly as any others'. His fierce non-conformity bred friction, and Morton later recalled that at one point he had suspended Lapthorne, who 'did threaten me to my face to be even with me at Parliament'. This rift was not permanent however. After Morton was translated to Durham in 1632, Lapthorne asked him for a charge, having been silenced in London and its hinterland by High Commission. Morton placed him in Teesdale and Derwentdale, 'the most barbarous place within Northumberland', 'wherein also he has not been unprofitable'.¹¹⁷ Lapthorne's personality and serial non-conformity did not blind Morton to his gifts, and the Bishop dealt patiently with him over a number of years, to harness his abilities for the good of the Church.

Morton was careful in his exercise of patronage. According to Rosemary O'Day, 'the men he preferred at all levels appear to have been of moderate puritan persuasion and to have been enthusiastic preachers'.¹¹⁸ He took great care over the appointment of his chaplains, and gave them both encouragement and patronage. Ralph Brownrigg was promoted to the Archdeaconry of Coventry in 1631, and was later to become a prebendary at Durham- when Morton was bishop. Other chaplains included James Povey, the rector of Willey, and Nathaniel Williams, who was presented to four livings during Morton's episcopate, including Dunchurch and Tachbroke, both of which were episcopal advowsons. Alexander Howe, the rector of Draycott-in-the-Moors and Caverswall, and domestic chaplain to the Bishop, was collated to the prebend of Ulveton in

¹¹⁶ SP 16/412/58; Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.224.

¹¹⁷ SP 16/412/58; 16/436/22; M.Tillbrook 'Arminianism and Society in County Durham', in D.Marcombe (ed.), *The Last Principality* (Loughborough, 1987), pp.202-226.

¹¹⁸ R. O'Day, *The English Clergy* (Leicester, 1979), p.153.

1626.¹¹⁹ On these, and others, Morton ‘freely bestowed such spiritual preferments as fell to his patronage’. Another recipient of his favour was George Canner. Canner, with whom Morton became acquainted when he was at Chester, was an intellectually gifted blind boy. Morton maintained him and his tutor uncle at Chester Grammar School and later at St. John’s, Cambridge. After attaining his B.A., Canner became a member of Morton’s household and was instructed in theology by the Bishop, who later ordained him and placed him as curate in his living at Clifton Campville (Staffordshire).¹²⁰ Morton took equal care over clerical ordinations, not trusting ‘his own chaplains in this sacred business’. His early biographer claimed that he only ordained graduates, and examined them first in ‘university learning’ and particularly divinity, making them answer ‘syllogistically according to their abilities’.¹²¹

Another example of Morton’s pastoral pains at local level can be seen in his handling of the notorious case of William Perry of Bilston, near Wolverhampton, an account of which was published in 1622, by Richard Baddeley the bishop’s secretary, entitled *The Boy of Bilson*.¹²² Perry claimed to be possessed by demons, manifesting dramatic symptoms, despite attempts at exorcism by some Catholic priests. Morton, suspecting the boy’s condition to be counterfeit, received permission from the circuit judges to take him to Eccleshall Castle to ‘find out the imposture before the next assizes’.¹²³ As a manifestation of his possession, Perry would go into a fit at the reading of the first verse of chapter one of the gospel of John. To test his condition, the Bishop read him a passage from his Greek New Testament, ‘the devil being so ancient a scholar as of almost 6,000 years standing’.¹²⁴ Reading the twelfth verse of the first chapter of John,

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, LJRO, B/A/1/16.

¹²⁰ Barwick, *A Summary Account*, p.89.

¹²¹ Baddeley, *Life of Morton*, p.95.

¹²² *Idem*, *The Boy of Bilson, or a True Discovery of the late Notorious Impostures of certain Romish Priests in their pretended exorcism, or expulsion of the devil out of a young boy named William Perry, son of Thomas Perry of Bilson in the county of Staffs* (London, 1622).

¹²³ Barwick, *A Summary Account*, p.90.

¹²⁴ Baddeley, *Boy of Bilson*, p.58.

the boy, 'supposing [it] to be the first verse, did accordingly, as he was formerly wont, fall into the passion of a trance'.¹²⁵ Afterwards the Bishop read him the first verse in Greek and the lad, not recognising the text, was 'not a whit troubled therewith'. Perry later complained of stomach pains, and the next morning 'made water in a urinal and it was found that the water was as black as ink' - which was later found to be literally true, the boy having secretly mixed some with his urine. Exposed as a fraud, Perry, burst into tears and confessed all.¹²⁶ He later appeared before the assize judges at Stafford, where he made public his contrition.¹²⁷ Morton then took Perry and 'bound him out apprentice to a shoemaker in Bristol'.¹²⁸

Baddeley's pamphlet sought to expose 'the imposture of certain Romish priests in their pretended exorcism'.¹²⁹ As well as showing Morton as a wise and caring pastor, it used the episode to attack the claims of apostolicity which, Catholics asserted, were authenticated by their unique ability to perform exorcisms. Not only had the priests failed to 'deliver' Perry; they had even been unable to detect a case of counterfeit possession.¹³⁰

Morton continued to publish anti-Catholic literature. In 1626 he published *The Grand Imposture of the Church of Rome*, which dealt with Rome's claim to be the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church, 'the mother and mistress of all

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.59.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.64.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.73.

¹²⁸ Barwick, *A Summary Account*, p.90. According to Barwick, Perry was still living in 1659, 'in or about London', in the parish of St. Martin's-in-the Fields.

¹²⁹ See full title of pamphlet above, p.76.

¹³⁰ In the 1580s there had been an attempt, on the part of some Catholic missionaries, to reconquer England for Catholicism. This had included a systematic campaign of exorcisms, which had been launched among some members of leading recusant households. The purpose of the campaign was to demonstrate the apostolic credentials of Roman Catholicism, in that only priests of the True Faith had the power to perform the miracle of the casting out of devils. Baddeley's pamphlet begins with a warning to the Christian reader about the danger of being duped by counterfeit miracles, and is 'professedly written for a discovery of and caution against the enveagling [*sic*] projects of Roman priests, chief in that one particular, viz. their pretended priestly exorcising and expelling of devils out of bodies possessed'. Various advertisements follow about how the reader may 'discover and avoid such popish delusions'. The section commences by criticising 'the false proposition of the Romanists who make the use of miracles to be perpetual and necessary to the Catholic Church'. K.Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1997), pp.488-9; Baddeley, *Boy of Bilson*, intro.

other Churches', outside which there was no salvation. Morton, unsurprisingly, denied such claims.¹³¹ Morton maintained that Rome itself was guilty of schism, and condemned its claim that subjection to the Pope was essential to salvation, as false, scandalous and 'every way damnable'. In 1631 he published an attack on the Mass, *Of the Institution of the Sacrament of the Blessed Body and Blood of Christ*, in which he sought to demonstrate that the Mass 'is a very mass, or rather gulf, of many superstitious and idolatrous positions and practices'.¹³² Both *The Grand Imposture* and *Of the Institution of the Sacrament* prompted Catholic replies.¹³³ Within the diocese, Morton was less effective in dealing with the Catholic 'problem'. Coventry and Lichfield contained substantial 'pockets' of Catholicism which proved resistant to Protestantism throughout this period.¹³⁴

Morton's ecclesiology was one of Calvinist conformity, and he was a careful examiner of his clergy. How effective was he in governing his diocese? O'Day reveals that the subscription books, letters, court and visitation books of the period confirm Baddeley's view of a 'vigorous, unselfish and reforming episcopate'.¹³⁵ To function effectively, Morton also needed to gather a team of like-minded subordinates. The extensive survey of the episcopal estates, undertaken by his deputy, Richard Baddeley, in 1623, was, in part, instigated to take advantage of the economic and patronage opportunities that presented

¹³¹ He found the Roman claim to be 'a blasphemous condemnation of the most godly general councils of the church', which made the schism between Rome and Protestants bigger', and the article which contained the doctrine 'damnable'. He accused Rome of departing from the apostolic faith by introducing a novel doctrine, quoting Luther's assertion that it was heresy for any church to take upon her to create a new article of faith. Morton, *Grand Imposture*, p.336.

¹³² T.Morton, *Of the Institution of the Sacrament of the Blessed Body and Blood of Christ (by some called) the Mass of Christ. Eight Books; Discovering the superstitious, sacrilegious and idolatrous abominations of the Romish Mass together with The Consequent Obstinacies, Overtures of perjuries and the heresies discernible in the defenders thereof. Thomas, L. Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. (1631).*

¹³³ J.Price, *Anti-Mortonus or an apology in defence of the church of Rome. Against the grand imposture of doctor T.Morton* (St. Omer, 1640). Barwick, in his list of the Bishop's publications, mentions that 'there were some strictures written upon the former (*Of the Institution*) by a Romish Author under the name of an English baron', *Summary Account*, p.135.

¹³⁴ See chapter 4.

¹³⁵ R.O'Day, 'Cumulative Debt: the Bishops of Coventry and Lichfield and their Economic Problems', *Midland History*, 3 (1975-6), p.89.

themselves.¹³⁶ Morton held the rights to 27 prebendal stalls, 14 cures and the four archdeaconries.¹³⁷ Exercising this limited patronage, however, was usually dependent on the death or promotion of an incumbent. Moreover, prebendal estates might provide a negligible income because they were encumbered with leases. The consequences of patronage were always unpredictable; a client's theological development might eventually lead him to undermine the theological position of his patron. William Jeffrey, Morton's domestic chaplain, was made archdeacon of Salop in 1628, and in 1631, the Puritan Sir Thomas Leigh presented him to the rectory of Hampstall Ridware. Under Morton's successor, however, Jeffrey was to prove an enthusiastic champion of Arminian innovations.¹³⁸ A bishop also had other demands calls on his patronage, which might sometimes be granted as a favour to suitors, to express gratitude to his own patrons, or in submission to a higher authority.¹³⁹

William Overton had experienced repeated conflict with the dean and chapter of Lichfield, and claimed this had impeded the effective government of the see.¹⁴⁰ Morton's relationships were less stormy, but still problematic. He had little influence in the appointment of the dean. At his translation to Lichfield in 1619, he 'inherited' William Tooker, who served as dean from 1604 to 1621, under five bishops. Tooker's *Of the Fabric of the Church and Churchmen* (1604), dedicated to the King, attacked Puritanism for its tendency towards ecclesiastical democracy, claiming it paved the way for spiritual anarchy.¹⁴¹ He was succeeded by Walter Curll. Less enthusiastic about anti-Catholic polemic than Morton, he questioned the merits of such works written without 'necessity compelling' or

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ O'Day, *The English Clergy*, pp.147-8.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 144-158; see chapter 7.

¹³⁹ Stephen Haxbie, whom Morton instituted to the prebendary of Wolney in 1619, and George Gippes, a fellow of St.John's, Cambridge, who became prebendary of Freford, at Lichfield, in 1631 were both associated with Morton's old college, St. John's, Cambridge. O'Day, *English Clergy*, p.154; LJRO, B/A/1/16.

¹⁴⁰ See chapter 1.

¹⁴¹ A chaplain to James, he had previously ingratiated himself to Elizabeth by publishing a historical vindication of the power to cure scrofula, which he claimed was inherent in the English monarchy. *DNB*

lacking official sanction. Curll held the office until his elevation as bishop of Rochester in 1627.¹⁴²

Augustine Lindsell, formerly a fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge, owed his appointment as dean in 1628 to William Laud.¹⁴³ A member of the group associated with Neile as Bishop of Durham, Lindsell's name appears frequently in the correspondence of Richard Montagu and John Cosin.¹⁴⁴ The esteem in which Lindsell was held by Laud, Cosin and Montagu is indicative of the gulf between him and his diocesan on the doctrine of grace.¹⁴⁵ At a parliamentary committee meeting in 1626, Morton told the anti-Arminian M.P. Christopher Sherland that 'he would sooner die than hold some of his [Richard Montagu's] opinions'.¹⁴⁶ Lindsell had been a prebendary at Durham Cathedral since 1619, and in 1629, when he was Dean of Lichfield, charges were brought against him and other Durham prebendaries regarding innovations in the northern cathedral.¹⁴⁷ The innovators were accused of seeking to re-introduce popery, and Lindsell, as prebendary, was censured personally. 'But you, Dr. Lindsell, craftily lurking in corners, make bolts for your friend Cosin and others to shoot, and you are thought to sit at the stern of popish Arminianism in England'.¹⁴⁸ Both Morton and Lindsell left Coventry and Lichfield in 1632. Morton was translated to Durham, and his Arminian dean was elevated to the bishopric of Peterborough.

¹⁴² Surprisingly, Julian Davies describes Curll, when bishop, as 'orthodox in a very reformed sense'. J.Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church* (Oxford,1992), p.199.

¹⁴³ SP 16/113/19. In a letter to Laud, dated August, 1628, Cosin prayed that God might reward Laud 'for rewarding Lindsell's learning and goodness with a dignity of the Church'! Lindsell became Bishop of Peterborough in 1632. He was translated to Hereford in 1633, where he died in 1634. *DNB*.

¹⁴⁴ He was held in affectionate esteem by the two men. For instance, in a letter to 'honest John' at Durham House, Montagu wrote, 'Remember me to his Lordship, my love to Austin'. Ormsby, *Correspondence of John Cosin*, Part II, p.21.

¹⁴⁵ Cosin's correspondence also reveals the factionalism within the Church in the 1620s. On June 24th., 1625, Montagu wrote to Cosin: 'What hath Dr. Lindsell angered the Bedlem of Ex. in?' (Ormsby thinks that this is probably a reference to Dr. Prideaux, who was the rector of Exeter College, Oxford). 'His pamphlet can not be pestilent...The man was never better than a butter-quean (sic) to rail down right ribaldry. I am glad Dr. Lindsell is brought upon the stage'. *Ibid.*, p.77.

¹⁴⁶ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp.132,170-5.

¹⁴⁷ These charges had originated in a sermon by Peter Smart at Durham cathedral. Smart had been chaplain to William James, Bishop of Durham 1606-1617. James's successor was Richard Neile.

¹⁴⁸ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.162.

The years 1603-1632 had seen five bishops at Lichfield. To what extent do their careers mirror episcopal trends nationwide? Collinson has noted changing attitudes to the episcopacy in James's reign, as compared with that of his predecessor, in the growing socio-political acceptability of the episcopal office.¹⁴⁹ Fincham has remarked that this was largely the responsibility of the King, who defended *iure divino* episcopal origins to bolster his position as Supreme Governor, and ended the *de facto* exile from court of Elizabeth's bishops, so that 'the episcopate resumed the traditional role of ecclesiastical statesmen and privy councillors'.¹⁵⁰ The greater respect now afforded to bishops can be clearly seen at Coventry and Lichfield. The relative obscurity and provincial bickerings of William Overton contrast with the national profile enjoyed by the four bishops who succeeded him. George Abbot's brief time as diocesan was terminated by his translation to London, from where he was soon moved to Canterbury. Neile and Overall were court bishops residing mostly in London, the former being a personal favourite of the King. Overall was a theologian whom James both respected and trusted. Morton, according to his own report, owed his promotion to the deanery of Winchester to James, and was one of the leading anti-Catholic writers of his day, a scholar of international reputation. All five bishops, in the period 1603-1632, were men of conviction, who pursued differing agendas with passion and energy, and worked hard to secure their own type of reformation, whether they were based in the diocese or at court. Hugh Trevor-Roper's criticism that the Jacobean bench was 'indifferent, negligent and secular' is not supported by evidence from this diocese.¹⁵¹

Most modern research accepts a Calvinist consensus in the Church of England for sixty years after the accession of Elizabeth. According to Nicholas Tyacke, the religious majority 'believed Calvinism and the religious practices associated with Calvinistic belief to be the true orthodoxy', an outlook 'shared by

¹⁴⁹ Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, pp. 36-37, 39-42. Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.5.

¹⁵⁰ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.6.

¹⁵¹ H.Trevor-Roper, 'James I and his Bishops', in *Historical Essays* (London, 1957), pp.130-45.

the mainstream of Calvinist episcopalianism' under James.¹⁵² If so, Coventry and Lichfield stands outside the national picture. Neile and Overall were both leaders of Arminianism within the Church. Overall was in the van of the movement, and continued to be an influence after his death, through 'disciples' such as Neile, Cosin and Montagu. Neile was increasingly influential, particularly after his translation to Durham in 1617. Neither adopted the role of preaching pastor, favoured by many of their Calvinist peers.¹⁵³ Bishop Morton, by contrast, exemplified such a Scriptural role. His charity and concern for his flock, clergy and laity, won the commendation of his biographers. According to Baddeley, Morton was the living transcript of a Pauline bishop.¹⁵⁴ Bold in his defence of the faith against the claims of Roman Catholicism, his stance was beginning to look a little old-fashioned by the later 1620s, as the Arminians strengthened their grip on the Church.

Any bishop faced various obstacles to effective church government. Their large diocese, consisting of two counties and substantial areas of two others, left the bishop dependent on the conscientious performance of the parish clergy, diocesan officials and churchwardens. Neither Neile nor Overall, as court bishops, resided in the see, and Neile had onerous responsibilities elsewhere. Both relied heavily on diocesan administrators to make their government effective. Morton, too, gathered like-minded subordinates around him, but some influential appointments were in the hands of his opponents, and to some extent undermined his leadership.

Thomas Morton was bishop for thirteen years, a longer period than Neile and Overall together, and the first bishop since Overton to live in the diocese. Yet he too had outside interests (through his writings, in Parliament and in theological controversy) which occupied much of his time. He was active in the House of

¹⁵² N.Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution', in C.Russell (ed.), *The Origins of the English Civil War* (Basingstoke, 1973), pp.119-43.

¹⁵³ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.5.

¹⁵⁴ Baddeley, *Life of Morton*, p.172.

Lords, where he acted as Archbishop Abbot's parliamentary spokesman in 1625. In 1626, when Richard Montagu's teachings were debated at the York House conference, Morton led the attack on Montagu.¹⁵⁵ Such responsibilities may, in part, have hindered his effective government of the see. Despite his anti-Catholic polemics, there is evidence within Staffordshire and elsewhere that some areas remained apparently impervious to the reformed faith.

Morton's reputation as a preaching pastor, and his counselling and care of individuals, brought him the respect and admiration of many contemporaries. His career was held up as an episcopal template by some. Yet Morton had faced the problems common to any bishop, as well as those peculiar to the diocese. His patronage was very limited, a situation which was exacerbated by the distrust and lack of support he experienced from the King, Laud and the new ecclesiastical leadership of the later 1620s. The appointment, by Laud, of Lindsell as dean of Lichfield brought an *avant-garde* Arminian to a position of great influence in the diocese, and undercut Morton's authority. When he moved to Durham, in 1632, he was to encounter even more interference from the Laudian party.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp. 132, 170-175. See also p.80 of this chapter.

¹⁵⁶ Tilbrook, 'Arminianism and Society in County Durham', pp. 211, 217.

CHAPTER 3

Puritanism in the diocese, 1603-1640

The diocese of Coventry and Lichfield was not known as a Puritan stronghold. What characteristics did Puritanism take in a relatively infertile area? Did the 'godly' behave differently, and did bishops treat them differently (as they did in the province of York) because the region was only slowly secured for the Protestant faith? This chapter will survey the activities of Puritan clergymen, consider lay patronage, and look for evidence of gentry and 'popular' support.

Puritanism

The 'hotter sort of Protestants' centred their lives on a spiritual experience, the saving grace of God manifested to them personally in Christ through God's word, which was authoritative in all aspects of doctrine and practice, and led to the active pursuit of a godly life. It was the duty of each believer to mortify the corruptions that remained within, and, where opportunity arose, to restrain sin and promote righteousness in others. The term 'Puritan' was commonly used to denote such people. Writing in 1646, John Gereë maintained that the Puritan's whole life was 'a warfare, wherein Christ was his captain; his arms prayers and tears; the cross his banner, and his word *vincit qui patitur*'.¹

The term has been a source of debate over the years, and the principal issues have been reiterated recently by Peter Lake.² Were Puritans a definable

¹ 'He conquers who suffers'. J.Gereë, *The Character of an Old English Puritane or Non-Conformist* (London, 1646). For pejorative uses of the term, see below, pp. 92, fn.15, and 140.

² P. Lake, 'Defining Puritanism-again?' in F.J.Bremer (ed.), *Puritanism, Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth Century Anglo-American Faith* (Boston, 1993), pp.3-29; *idem*, 'The Problem of Puritanism' (1999), unpublished conference paper.

group, recognisable to themselves and others, with a shared ecclesiology and a distinctive culture, or a chimera, the name simply used to denigrate opponents?

One modern historian, William Hunt, has declared that 'a Puritan who minded his own business was a contradiction in terms'.³ Lay Puritans in situations of authority were exhorted by their ministers to use their position to stamp out vice and encourage God-fearing behaviour; such men were often at the forefront of the reformation of manners.⁴ The Puritans' motivation, however, was primarily religious, in that they 'felt most keenly the need to express their religious calling, to validate their individual spiritual condition in a stream of other-directed works of charity and to protect the nation through the repression and punishment of sin, from the providential visitations of a God provoked beyond endurance by that sin'.⁵

How extensive was the Puritan clerical presence in the Coventry and Lichfield diocese in 1603? Because of limitations of the surviving evidence, it is impossible to know.⁶ Nevertheless, there was clearly a dearth of zealous preachers in the diocese. In 1604, Staffordshire had about 20 Puritan ministries;

³ W. Hunt, *The Puritan Moment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p.140.

⁴ K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an Essex Village, Terling 1525-1700* (Oxford, 1995).

⁵ Lake 'Defining Puritanism', p.11.

⁶ There are only extant Puritan surveys for Warwickshire (1586) and Staffordshire (1604). The diocesan Elizabethan Clergy List of 1602, in comparison, underestimated the number of preachers in the diocese, and contradicted some of the information on the earlier lists. For instance, in the Archdeaconry of Coventry, Barwell of Seckington and Edward Enos of Bilton were both recorded as preachers in 1586; the 1602 list failed to document this. The Staffordshire survey recorded 48 preachers, compared with 15 on the 1602 list, and commented only on those preachers of whom it disapproved. Being licensed by a zealous Bishop was not necessarily an indication of a painful preacher. Bishop Bentham, who had impressive evangelical credentials, licensed Robert Freeman, vicar of Ashley (1574-1606), who was 'very slow in preaching', and Thomas Lea of Muckleston (1578-1630), who was 'offensive to the whole country [and] preacheth very seldome'. Excluding pluralists, about 20 on the 1604 list did not meet with its disapproval. Neither were all Puritans licensed to preach. In 1586, Henry Clarke of Leamington Priors was described as a non-preacher, 'yet of some towardlines', and similarly, Richard Hill, apparently also unlicensed, was described as 'a honest man of towardliness'. The Puritans sometimes 'damned with faint praise' those whom historians would regard as firmly within the Puritan camp. In 1586, William Keeling of Shotteswell was described as 'some zeal, little knowledge'. A. Peel (ed.), *The Second Part of a Register* (Cambridge, 1915), vol. 2, pp.165-174; *idem* (ed.), 'A Puritan Survey of the Church in Staffordshire', *English Historical Review*, 26, (1911), pp.338-352; J.C.Cox, 'An Elizabethan Clergy List of the Diocese of Lichfield', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, vi (1884), pp.157-180.

Essex, in comparison, possessed 94 'good and faithful' preachers.⁷ Parishes with Puritan ministries in Warwickshire included Southam, Bedworth, Wolston, Radway, Newbould, Arley, Sheldon, Bulkington and Newbould. Elsewhere in the diocese it is not always possible to be so specific.⁸ Some other parts of the see appear to have been devoid of such 'painful' (painstaking) ministry. According to the survey of 1604, Lichfield, with a cathedral and three parishes, had 'no ordinary preachers in the whole city', while the peculiar of the Collegiate Church in Wolverhampton, with three chapels, was similarly unsupplied.⁹ The rector of Birmingham was the pluralist, Luke Smith, and, at this period, there does not appear to have been a regular Puritan ministry in the town.¹⁰ It is quite possible that, in 1604, Puritan clerical strength in the whole diocese did not match the number of "godly" preachers in Essex. However, the apparent lack of a Puritan ministry did not invariably imply an absence of Puritans. Coventry, for example, experienced considerable Puritan activity in the 1570s and 1580s, which the authorities had endeavoured to stifle. Despite the later efforts of the conformist Archdeacon, William Hinton, and conformist ministers at the two parish churches, Puritan practice there was not effectively curtailed. Samuel Clarke, the martyrologist, who was educated in the city, described it as 'a place which at that time flourished exceedingly with religious ministers and people'.¹¹

⁷ Hunt, *Puritan Movement*, p.106.

⁸ For instance, in Staffordshire, at Stoke-on-Trent, a peculiar of the Bishop, the curate was the Puritan, Thomas Lightfoot. Other possible examples of Puritans may be found at Penkridge, where 'Mr. Johnson' and his assistant 'Mr. Parker' were both licensed preachers, at Bramshall, Abbots Bromley, Harbury and Kinver. In Derbyshire, William Dethicke was at Hartshorne and Simon Presse at Egginton. Brampton had a non-conformist curate, and it is probable that there was an evangelical ministry at Ashbourne. In Shropshire, the town preacher at St. Mary's was William Bright, a fellow of Emmanuel College; the minister at Moreton Corbet, the home of the Puritan Corbets, was Lodwicke Taylor, but such a tally obviously excludes many Puritans who ministered in the diocese at this time.

⁹ 'Puritan Survey in Staffordshire', pp.350-1.

¹⁰ Smith was also rector of Solihull.

¹¹ P. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford, 1967), pp.327-8; D. Oldridge, 'Conflict within the Established Church in Warwickshire' (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1992), ch.7; V.C.H., *Warwickshire*, vol.8, pp.372-3; B. Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans* (London, 1813), vol.1, p.444; S. Clarke, *Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons* (London, 1683), p.3.

The Varieties of Clerical Puritanism

Puritan clergy in the diocese were ranged across a wide spectrum, from painful ministers who conformed to the stipulations of the Prayer Book, through partial conformists, to ministers on the brink of secession. This section looks at a number of clerics at different points along this spectrum, and their attitudes to authority and conformity. Seventeenth-century literature distorts the picture, favouring the remarkable and notorious, at the expense of evangelical conformists who did not appear in the church courts, published no writings, and did not enjoy the benefit of a hagiographer.

A rare glimpse of painful conformity can be found in William Bagshawe's *De Spiritualibus Pecci* (1702), reminiscences of godly ministers and laymen in the Peak District of Derbyshire from the 1630s onwards.¹² John Rowlandson, the rector of the peculiar of Bakewell, 1615-1650, had been presented to the cure as the result of a petition by the churchwardens and inhabitants, with the support of Sir John Manners, and Hamlett Charlton, the previous incumbent, who had desired on his death bed that Rowlandson 'build on his foundation'. William Tooker, the dean of Lichfield, recommended Rowlandson to the living, declaring that 'we can have but a Laborious and Godly and painful pastor in this place, and therefore, I pray you, let him taste our lawful favour'.¹³ Bagshawe depicts him as a godly yet conformist minister who was as conscientious a catechist as he was a preacher. At Bakewell, Sheldon and Over-Hadden there were 'divers praying Persons and Families that were seals of his ministry'.¹⁴ His curates, Mellor at Tedington and Craven at Longnor were also painful conformists. Craven was an 'able industrious preacher' noted for 'his free plain manner of reproof', while

¹² W.Bagshawe, *De Spiritualibus Pecci; Notes (or Notices) Concerning the work of God and some of those who have been Workers together with God, in the Hundred of the High Peak in Derbyshire* (London, 1702).

¹³ LJRO, Dean and Chapter T4-5, in R.Clark, 'Lists of Derbyshire Clergymen 1558-1662', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 104 (1984), p.39.

¹⁴ Bagshawe, *De Spiritualibus Pecci*, p.7.

Mellor's ministry was 'sound and sweet'.¹⁵ Rowlandson's third curate was Broxholm of Buxton. Broxholm was a non-conformist, but his freedom to minister was not curtailed because there was 'a most entire union of hearts and affections' between him and Rowlandson, his ordinary. 'Mr. R. of Bakewell was so far from silencing of Mr. B. at Buxton, because he laboured in his Parish, that he did to his power preserve his liberty'.¹⁶

John Burges, minister of Sutton Coldfield (1617-1635), was also a conformist, although he arrived at this position only after considerable struggle. Born in 1563, he took a medical degree at Cambridge before entering the ministry.¹⁷ In 1592 he was deprived by the Bishop of Lincoln for refusing to make the sign of the cross in baptism.¹⁸ He later subscribed but, fearing that James was about to change the doctrine of the Church, then decided that he could no longer do so.¹⁹ In 1605 Burges was ejected from his living at Waddesdon, Buckinghamshire, for non-subscription.²⁰ On the day of his deprivation he professed before a hundred witnesses that if 'there was no such alteration in the Churches intendment as I apprehended, I would then subscribe as I had done before without scruple'.²¹ Assured by Abbot that there had been no alteration in the doctrine of the Church of England and that James intended to change nothing, Burges re-subscribed in 1616 and was restored to the ministry of the Church (with

¹⁵ When war broke out 'opposers of what they counted Puritanism' brought Mellor before the Quarter Sessions at Bakewell, accusing him of being a 'Puritan or Roundhead'. When asked to explain what was meant by these terms they mentioned such practices as family prayers and Mellor's observance of the Lord's day and his antipathy to 'their Prophanation of it by Sports and Pastimes'. He was released. *Ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.10, 14-16.

¹⁷ F.L.Colville, *The Worthies of Warwickshire* (Warwick, 1869), pp171-72.

¹⁸ J.Burges, *An Answer Rejoynd to that Much Applauded Pamphlet: A Reply to Dr. Morton's Generall Defence of the Three Nocent Ceremonies* (London, 1631), p.16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.17. The intervening years were not without problems. After his deprivation in 1592, he changed his mind and subscribed, 'being fully persuaded of the lawfulness of ceremonies', but nevertheless preached before James that it would be better to take away the offending ceremonies 'than throw out ministers for them'. Unimpressed, James sent Burges to the Tower for a short time. In 1604, believing in the Canons of that year that there was a variation between the doctrine and intention of the Church, he published an *Apologie* which showed by what sense and construction he had formerly yielded to subscription and that, in the current situation, such conformity was no longer merited.

²⁰ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor* (Oxford, 1990), p.324.

²¹ Burges, *An Answer*, p.18.

the help of James Montagu) with the King's permission.²² Burges's non-conformist critics accused him of having changed his mind about ceremonies when he was offered the lucrative benefice of Sutton Coldfield. He denied the charge, insisting that he had already subscribed and had been a preacher at Bishopsgate, London, for six months before he heard anything about the parish, and that he did not know Robert Shilton, the wealthy Puritan mercer from Birmingham who owned the advowson, until offered the living.²³ Furthermore, when the call to Sutton came, he was then in well-paid practice as a doctor, 'which I affirme upon my conscience to have been every yeare as profitable as my Benefice is in three yeares at the least'. He had subscribed through personal conviction, not for gain: 'I may boldly say this, that I have parted with more profit by taking up conformitie and a Benefice, than any man in England hath done by his Inconformitie, and losse of his Benefice. Therefore it was not a Benefice that drew mee on'.²⁴

Another example of a Puritan conformist can be found in William Fenner (1600-1640), briefly vicar of Sedgley, Staffordshire, c.1626-1627. Fenner's exemplary piety and evangelical zeal were allied to a conformist ecclesiology. According to Richard Baxter, he had defended the conformist position, 'honouring it by a wonderfully powerful and successful way of preaching, conference and holy living', so effectively that he stirred up local non-conformists to a more vehement advocacy of their own cause. He also stirred up those who were opposed to a painful ministry, who forced his removal to Essex.²⁵

These examples are indicative of a number of variations in practice and experience amongst the conformist Puritan ministers in the diocese, from those

²² Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.230. James Montagu was the first Master of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, the Puritan 'seminary'. He was elevated to the see of Bath and Wells in 1608, and translated to Winchester in 1616. He died in 1618. *DNB*.

²³ Burges, *An Answer*, p.20; W.Midgley, *A Short History of the Town and Chase of Sutton Coldfield* (Birmingham, 1904), p.63.

²⁴ Burges, *An Answer*, p.21.

²⁵ Brooks, *Lives of the Puritans*, vol. 2, p.451; M. Sylvester (ed.), *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London, 1696), p.13.

whose scruples were, apparently, quiescent (Craven and Mellor), through tolerance (Rowlandson), to the zeal of Fenner, and of Burgess who vacillated between non-conformity and subscription, before ending up as a convinced and proselytising conformist. All were united in promoting a religion both painful and evangelistic.

Information concerning ministers who conformed only partly is more plentiful. Like their conformist peers, they were not uniform in their expression of dissent. In this group, even those who had been deprived or suspended from their livings could still wield considerable authority among fellow believers. The ministries of John Oxenbridge, Humphrey Fenn, William Bradshaw and John Ball were all supported by members of the Puritan laity after they had been disciplined, their influence generally unaffected, despite the disapproval of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

John Oxenbridge (c.1525-1618), became rector of Southam in 1572. He was one of the moderators of the fortnightly prophesyings at Coventry in the 1570s, and inaugurated prophesings in his own parish. At the end of the 1580s, Oxenbridge was one of the twelve Warwickshire ministers who subscribed to the *Book of Discipline*, a Presbyterian alternative to episcopal government, which called on fellow believers not to communicate with unlearned ministers, and regarded bishops, their courts and ordination as unlawful. Disciplined by the High Commission, he returned to Southam, where he continued to be a thorn in the side of the ecclesiastical authorities, calling unofficial fast days that were renowned amongst the Puritan fraternity. Like the prophesyings of the 1570s, such meetings enabled Puritan ministers and lay supporters to gather to hear sermons, preached by members of the ministerial fraternity.²⁶ The deprivation of Oxenbridge in 1603 did little to diminish his reputation amongst his co-religionists. In 1609, Coventry Corporation established a lectureship at St. John's chapel, Bablake (which it

²⁶ O'Day, *English Clergy* (Leicester, 1979), pp.168-169.

owned, and which was independent of the city's beneficed clergy) and appointed Oxenbridge, by then in his mid-eighties, as its first lecturer.²⁷

Humphrey Fenn was another Puritan who lived on the brink of secession. Instituted to Holy Trinity, Coventry, in 1578, he was suspended in 1584 for refusing to subscribe to the Three Articles. Restored to his charge through the intercession of Leicester in 1585, he was again suspended in 1590 for involvement with the Presbyterian 'associations' of Warwickshire clergy, which were under his and Thomas Cartwright's joint leadership. Fenn was deprived of his living and, with Cartwright and others, imprisoned by High Commision. He was released after the intercession of James VI of Scotland. Fenn returned to Coventry, where he was an influential Puritan presence in the city, concerned with ministerial training, and where he continued 'above forty years a laborious and faithful preacher'.²⁸ His controversial will of 1634 castigated the organisation of the established church, with its unscriptural ceremonies, comparing it unfavourably with the 'best' continental reformed churches. Nevertheless, Fenn was not a schismatic, holding that it was unlawful to separate from the English church 'if therein a Christian may inioy true doctrine, with the sacraments from a Minister able to teach the truth, and where a worship of God is not forced by a personall acte to approve those corruptions'.²⁹

Two of the most influential ministers in the diocese, well known beyond it through their published writings, took a similar position. William Bradshaw and John Ball were both highly critical of the established church, but both eschewed schism. Bradshaw (1571-1618) the product of two Puritan Cambridge colleges (Emmanuel and Sydney Sussex) was later suspended from his ministry at

²⁷ See chapter 1, p26; P.Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford, 1967), pp.129,172,193,293,327; *idem*, 'Letters of Thomas Wood, Puritan, 1566-1577' in *Godly People* (Ramsgate, 1983), pp.60-1; CCRO, Council Book, BA/H/C/17/1, f 173, City Annals 958/1, f 32r in Oldridge, 'Conflict within the Established Church in Warwickshire', p.245.

²⁸ *DNB*; Brooks, *Lives of the Puritans*, vol.1, p.444.

²⁹ PRO, SP 16/260/83.

Chatham for refusing some of the ceremonies of the Church.³⁰ He returned to his native Leicestershire, where he was commended by Arthur Hildersham to Alexander Redich, a godly layman near Burton-on-Trent.³¹ Bradshaw held no parochial position but served as domestic chaplain to the Redich family, and also preached in the area, at Stapenhill parish church, having received from Bishop Overton, 'being a moderate man, a licence to preach in any part of the diocese'. When Richard Neile became bishop, he suppressed the exercises at Repton and Burton-on-Trent, in which Bradshaw took part, but did not withdraw his licence to preach. In 1617, Bishop Overall's Chancellor suspended Bradshaw from preaching, but the ban was revoked through influential mediation on his behalf.³² Bradshaw was widely known for his published writings. He wrote works attacking kneeling at Communion, but was strongly opposed to separatism, publishing attacks on anabaptism and separation.³³ Lake has argued that, despite his radical pamphlets, Bradshaw was a model divine of the Puritan (Emmanuel) school. 'As he had begun in the Emmanuel tradition', Lake comments, so

³⁰ Bradshaw believed that it was impossible to avoid offence by submitting to the ceremonies of the Church. Peter Lake maintains that he held them to be the remnants of popery which, he perceived, still pertained to the established Church. Bradshaw held that ceremonies such as the sign of the Cross in baptism, which were ratified by popish canons and constitutions, might be taken as 'popish' and anti-Christian even in the time of the Church Fathers. See P.Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge, 1983), pp266-67.

³¹ Hildersham (1563-1632) was a convert from Catholicism. Disinherited, he found a patron in Henry Hastings, who appointed him lecturer at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, where, in 1593, he was instituted to the vicarage. Often in trouble with the authorities, he was silenced by bishop Chaderton in 1605 for non-conformity and failing to subscribe, although Overton allowed him to preach in his diocese. A leader of the combination lectures at Burton and Repton, he was prosecuted as a schismatic at the High Commission in 1615. Licensed to preach again in 1625, he was suspended in 1630, for not wearing the surplice. He was restored in 1631. He was well-known and respected in Puritan circles in the diocese, and further afield. Like his friend William Bradshaw, he was opposed to separation. He gave spiritual and practical help and counselling to many ministerial brethren, including Bradshaw, Julines Herring, John Darrell, the exorcist, and Simeon Ashe, whom he tutored after the latter left Emmanuel. When he was dying, a day of prayer and fasting was called at Ashby, and Ashe led in prayer and preached twice. The day after his death, Herring lectured in Ashby church. According to Fuller, although Hildersham was a non-conformist, 'he loved all honest men'. *DNB*; S. Clarke, *The Lives of 32 Divines* (London, 1677), pp.116-122; T. Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1997), p.25; see above, Chapter 2.

³² Brooks, *Lives of the Puritans* vol. 2, p.268.

³³ See below, pp.108-110.

Bradshaw, bringing the fruits of true religion to the Redich household, was to end it'.³⁴

Like Bradshaw, John Ball (1585-1640) spent many of his later years under the wing of a godly layman. Ball had obtained a living at Whitmore, near Newcastle-under-Lyme, in about 1610, but was deprived for calling a day of prayer and fasting on the Feast of the Ascension, and was thereafter employed as chaplain in the house of Edward Mainwaring at Whitmore, 'a pious and much esteemed gentleman'. His duties included expounding the scriptures on a daily basis and catechising and counselling the family.³⁵ Despite the Canon of 1604 which forbade unauthorised fasting, Ball continued to maintain monthly fasts. He was also renowned for his ability to counsel fellow-ministers. Both John Cotton and Thomas Hooker conferred with him, prior to emigrating to New England, and Ball also provided a refuge for Thomas Langley, the minister of Middlewich, Cheshire, who had been harassed for non-conformity. Ball also studied, wrote, tutored ministerial students and preached at the exercises at Madeley (Staffordshire). Thomas Dugard, the Warwick schoolmaster, admired his renowned catechism, and the man himself, observing that he was 'as learned as he was religious'. The modern historian Tom Webster, has described Ball as 'perhaps the most important ecclesiology scholar of his generation'.³⁶

Among the ministers to receive Ball's counselling was Julines Herring (1582-1644).³⁷ From a Coventry family, Herring was educated at the 'Puritan seminary' of Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge. He was encouraged to enter the ministry by Humphrey Fenn of Coventry, and Arthur Hildersham of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, who secured Herring's first living at Calke, Derbyshire.³⁸ Like Ball, Herring had palliated his conscience by being ordained by an Irish bishop who

³⁴ Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church*, p.278.

³⁵ Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-two Divines*, pp.147, 149.

³⁶ Webster, *Godly Clergy*, pp. 25,54,68,273; Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge, 1987), p.74; see below, 'Puritan Literature'.

³⁷ Webster, *Godly Clergy*, p.40.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 295; S.Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-Two Divines*, p.159.

had not required him to subscribe. Calke was a peculiar, 'hence Herring's liberty was preserved'.³⁹ According to Samuel Clarke, 'because of the great scarcity of good preachers' people gadded to hear his ministry 'as doves to the windows'.⁴⁰ In 1618 the 'prelatical powers' forced him to leave Calke. Through the efforts of William Rowley, a Puritan layman in Shrewsbury, he was placed as lecturer at St. Alkmund's in the town by the feoffees of St. Antholin's. As well as delivering the Tuesday lecture there, he also preached on Sundays, but timed his sermon not to coincide with the ministry at other churches in Shrewsbury. Herring repeated his sermons at Rowley's house, and also at the homes of two other burgesses, George Wright and Edward Jones. Despite being presented in 1620 for 'reading a lecture most teusdaies and not readinge divine service or ministeringe the sacramens', and the later efforts of Peter Studeley, the vicar of St. Chad's (Shrewsbury) and others to have him removed as a non-conformist, Herring continued to minister intermittently in the town until 1635. His non-conformity was reported to Bishop Morton. Morton sought the advice of two local ministers, and was satisfied with Herring's integrity from their reports, but 'such were those times that he was suspended from the use of the ministry, though by the mediation of his friends the suspension was on various occasions taken off'.⁴¹ Like Bradshaw and Ball, Herring disputed against the separatist position when he was living in Shrewsbury, believing that it would 'eat like gangrene into the heart of godliness'.⁴²

At the far end of the Puritan spectrum, the diocese also contained some who had seceded from the established church. In 1606, Thomas Helwys, John Smyth and a group of deprived ministers, met at the home of the schismatics, Sir William and Lady Isobel Bowes, near Coventry, to discuss separation. Despite the warnings of Arthur Hildersham and others, some separated. A Baptist church was later founded in Coventry, one of five which, in 1626, were in

³⁹ Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-two Divines*, p.160.

⁴⁰ *Loc.cit.*

⁴¹ LJRO, B/V/1/39, pp.7,54; Clarke, *Lives of Divines*, p.161.

⁴² Clarke, *Lives of Divines*, p.162.

correspondence with the Mennonite church in Amsterdam. Helwys, (who settled in the Netherlands) embraced Arminianism, and it appears that the Coventry congregation followed suit.⁴³

Schismatics were a tiny minority, even amongst the Puritans, and clerical non-conformity was usually expressed within the confines of the established Church. Hugh Clarke (1563-1634), father of Samuel Clarke the martyrologist, and vicar of Wolston, Warwickshire from 1591 until his death in 1634, was a far more typical figure than Helwys.⁴⁴ An indication of Clarke's views can be found in the Warwickshire *comperta* of 1609-10, when he was presented for ministering communion to those who stood rather than kneeled, and for failing to wear the surplice, undertake the Rogationtide perambulation, or observe official fast days.⁴⁵ Strongly opposed to the Book of Sports, Clarke also clashed with a local Catholic landlord, who encouraged young people in the parish to have a Whitsun Ale and morris dancing. When the barn in which the dancing was taking place burned down, and the fire spread from house to house, destroying the homes of 'the chief of those who had a hand in the profane sports', this was seen as a providential judgment on the revellers.⁴⁶

The use of the surplice, the sign of the cross at baptism, and the Rogationtide procession were issues which also troubled many other ministers. The surplice, according to one Elizabethan cleric who appeared before Bishop Thomas Bentham, was 'a polluted and cursed mark of the beast'; through the use of 'such rags of Antichrist' the people would 'fall away from God into a second popery that will be worse than the first'.⁴⁷ In 1609, William Dethicke, rector of

⁴³ J.Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp.62-3; *V.C.H., Warwickshire*, vol. 8, p.373; Anon., 'Three Hundred Years of Baptist Life in Coventry', *Baptist Quarterly*, new series, 3 (1926-1927), pp.137-143; Thomas Helwys, *A Declaration of Faith* (1611). The other English churches in correspondence with the Mennonites were Lincoln, Salisbury, Tiverton and London.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 1.

⁴⁵ LJRO, B/V/1/22, p.32, 'doth not bid fastinge days'; he was also presented for serving 'two cures a day'.

⁴⁶ Clarke, *Lives of Thirty Two Divines*, pp.128-131.

⁴⁷ Quoted in P.McGrath, *Papists and Puritans under Elizabeth I* (1967), p.128. fn.

Hartshorne, Derbyshire, was accused of not wearing the surplice when he led worship.⁴⁸ William Butterson of Nuneaton and Valentine Overton of Bedworth were also presented in the Warwickshire *comperta* of 1609 over the issue.⁴⁹ Ralph Sherratt of Arley was presented in 1617 on the grounds that 'he usually weareth not the surplesse'.⁵⁰ His inconsistency was probably intended to placate unsympathetic churchwardens; by wearing the surplice occasionally, and on special occasions, a minister might hope to satisfy his church officers, and keep out of serious trouble if presented. Not all presentments, however, originated through the principled objection of the cleric. William Whitinge, rector of Egginton, Derbyshire, was presented in 1614 for not wearing the 'surplesse usually', but also for not having 'service sometymes uppon evens nor upon wednesdays and frydayes'.⁵¹ Whitinge appears to have been more lackadaisical than principled.

Another aspect of clerical non-conformity concerned some of the Book of Common Prayer. According to Philip Henry, the liturgy proved 'an everlasting bone of contention, till removed or mended'.⁵² Some Puritan ministers omitted parts of it, and if their churchwardens or congregations objected, they might find themselves before the church courts. In 1609 it was alleged that Simon Presse, William Whitinge's predecessor at Egginton, 'in his prayer before the sermon prayeth not for his ma[jest]tie'.⁵³ In Warwickshire in 1609, Ralph Sherratt was presented for not keeping to the order of service set down in the Prayer Book, a fault also shared by William Blakemore of Sheldon.⁵⁴ In the same year, the curate of St. Michael's, Coventry, Thomas Draper, was charged with failure to read

⁴⁸ LJRO., B/V/1/26, p.16. His sister(?), Katherine, married Alexander Redich of New Hall, the patron of William Bradshaw.

⁴⁹ LJRO, B/V/1/22, pp.3,10.

⁵⁰ LJRO, B/V/1/35, p.2.

⁵¹ LJRO, B/V/1/29, p.55.

⁵² M.Lee (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of Philip Henry* (London, 1882), p.80.

⁵³ LJRO, B/V/1/26, p.15. Amongst other accusations he was charged with 'omitting many times part of dyvine service, he often omitteth prayer on Wednesdays and frydays'. His faults may probably be ascribed to laziness.

⁵⁴ B/V/1/22, pp. 1 and 12.

public prayer in its entirety on holy days and reading the litany very infrequently.⁵⁵ George Williams, curate of Exhall, Warwickshire, compounded this offence by criticising the episcopal hierarchy.⁵⁶ In 1609, Draper was also presented for 'delivering communion on easter day to divers standing', a charge also brought against Daniel Naylor, rector of Harborough. Henry Bradshawe of Bulkington was presented again in 1617, this time because 'he ministreth not the communion according to the gesture prescribed'.⁵⁷

In the 1620s, clerical non-conformity appears to have been reported with less regularity than earlier in the century. This may, in part, be due to congregational support or acquiescence, as well as Morton's more tolerant attitude. Diocesan leadership in the years 1610-1632 went against the 'national trend'. Neile and Overall, 'proto-Arminians', held the see in the 1610s, whereas during the 1620s, as the Arminians strengthened their position nationally, Thomas Morton, a fairly typical example of a Jacobean bishop, held the see, which helps to explain the greater number of presentments in the earlier decade. Nevertheless, even under Morton, persistent non-conformists could find themselves before the courts. In 1629, Francis Capps, the vicar of Wolstanton, Staffordshire, was presented for not wearing the surplice. He also failed to make parishioners kneel for communion. Maria Brett, a member of his congregation, 'forebore' to kneel on a number of occasions but still received the sacrament from Capps, who gave it to her both 'wittingly and willingly'. There was an angry confrontation when a churchwarden sought to make her comply with the requirements of the law, and 'when the holy and blessed co[m]mun[i]on was in celebratinge the...vicar did revile and call one of the churchwardens knave and base fellowe with many other base speeches' because of his intervention.⁵⁸ The case shows the dilemmas which Puritan clergymen could face. They had to take their parishioners' scruples of

⁵⁵ B/V/1/22, p.5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁵⁷ B/V/1/35, p.4.

⁵⁸ B/V/1/52, Wolstanton, p.36.

conscience into account, as well as keeping out of trouble with the bishop. There was no way Capps could satisfy both Mrs. Brett and the churchwarden.

A few ministers fell foul of the authorities for multiple offences. Ralph Hulme, from Betley in Staffordshire, had preached at Harthill in the Malpas deanery of the diocese of Chester, and was charged before the Chester consistory court in 1631 with speaking in favour of extemporary prayers and criticising the concentration of clergy in cathedrals, when preachers were so scarce in the country as a whole. He was also charged with failing to wear the surplice and omitting the sign of the cross in baptism.⁵⁹ Ralph Sherratt, minister at Arley, Warwickshire since 1602, was charged in 1628 with still more offences. He stood accused of neglecting ceremonies and the surplice, failing to use the sign of the cross in baptism and the ring in marriage, and faced allegations that he ‘with divers other persons met together’ and ‘held private conventicles and have consulted and had conference together upon points of religion contrary to the laws in that case provided’. He was also accused of administering the sacrament to those ‘standing or sitting or leaning in an unseemly and [irrev]erent manner’.⁶⁰ Sherratt later stood down from the living, his living being taken by his son, John.⁶¹

In 1632, Bishop Morton moved to Durham, and was replaced by Robert Wright, who was sympathetic to the Laudian innovations. Some known Puritans managed to escape censure, which may indicate that they now reluctantly conformed. Others found themselves in trouble. At the Metropolitan Visitation of 1635, Guilpin, the minister of Knowle, whom Wright had reported to Sir Nathaniel Brent, Laud’s Vicar-General, was presented for delivering the sacrament to eighteen persons who remained seated, ‘for not wearing the surplisse constantly’, neglecting services on Holy Days and omitting the sign of the cross at baptism.⁶² In 1636, Arnett, the curate of Allestree, Derby, was presented for not

⁵⁹ R.C.Richardson, *Puritans in North-West England* (Manchester, 1972), p.54.

⁶⁰ LJRO, B/C/5, 1628 (1).

⁶¹ LJRO, B/C/11, John Sherrard, W.P., 1635; W. Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (London, ed. 1730), vol.1, p.106. John’s brother, Manoah, became minister on 26th. September, 1635.

⁶² B/V/1/56, p.23.

wearing the surplice; Wamewright, the curate at Chesterfield, had worn the garment only once, and the churchwardens had no recollection of his ever administering at communion.⁶³ In 1639, the vicar of St. Peter's, Derby, was presented for not presenting a number of offenders, including those who were late-comers to Sunday worship, 'nor any that sitt with their hatts on in time of divine service'.⁶⁴ The Laudian zeal for conformity also produced a number of suspensions. In 1635, Brent suspended Richard Lee, of Wolverhampton, a young curate of Dr. Burgis (probably of Sutton Coldfield), Charles Broxholme of Buxton, Smith, the minister of Honily (Warwickshire), and Madstar of Bridgnorth, all for non-conformity.⁶⁵ Amongst other clerics who fell foul of the hierarchy in the 1630s were Walter Hieron, curate of Chellaston (Derbyshire), suspended in 1636, and Ithiel Smart, of Wombourne, cited before Lichfield consistory court in 1639 for proclaiming a fast in contravention of the King's recent proclamation. In the same year, Immanuel Bourne of Ashover, Derbyshire, was brought before the High Commission for organising an unofficial fast day.⁶⁶

Combination Lectures and Collegiality

Clerics, whatever their position within the spectrum of non-seceding Puritanism, did not pursue their callings in isolation from their brethren. They gathered together, both formally in joint acts of worship, and more intimately as friends. The most important formal gatherings were the combination lectures and fasts. As Patrick Collinson has shown, the combination lecture was a common feature of Jacobean church life. Presbyterian in a general sense, the lectures were exercises in clerical collegiality, which, as Dr. O'Day has observed, strengthened the emergent professionalism among the clergy.⁶⁷

⁶³ B/V/1/56, p.77.

⁶⁴ B/V/1/64, p.115.

⁶⁵ See chapter 5, pp.205-206.

⁶⁶ Clarke, 'List of Derbyshire Clergymen', p.32; LJRO, B/C/3/16, 18 April 1639.

⁶⁷ Collinson, 'Lectures by Combination, Structures and Characteristics of Church Life in Seventeenth Century England' in *Godly People*, pp.467-498; O'Day, *English Clergy*, p.166.

Collinson has shown that the terms 'weekly exercises' and 'monthly lectures' were used loosely and that weekly lectures are best identified by the Caroline phrase 'lectures by combination'. In some towns a single lecturer was 'one in a combination.' Elsewhere a 'combination lecture or exercise was a device for a regular provision of preaching,' typically in a market town on market day or once a month. The combination comprised a panel of local ministers, ranging in number from three to twenty, who preached in order of age or academic seniority. 'Others of the combination would often be present, and the sermon would sometimes be followed by a conference amongst the ministers either before or during a dinner paid for by the magistrates of the town, or by the preachers themselves'.⁶⁸

In the first decade of the seventeenth century meetings and exercises were held at Repton (Derbyshire) and Burton-on-Trent (Staffordshire).⁶⁹ Both Arthur Hildersham and William Bradshaw took leading roles in the proceedings. Collinson has shown that in some towns there was both a resident preaching ministry and a combination lecture, and this was also true of Burton. The 1604 Puritan Survey of Staffordshire records that John Hassall, the curate, was a licensed preacher.⁷⁰ This suggests that providing preaching was not the only purpose of the lectures. Perhaps equally important, the associational character of the combination fraternal also reflected a sense of collegiality.⁷¹ This was all the more important in areas where Puritans were thinly spread; occasions for

⁶⁸ Collinson, 'Lectures by Combination', pp.467-68.

⁶⁹ These exercises were connected with those held at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, in Leicestershire. The diocese seems only to have possessed two combination lectures at this period. In 1573, exercises commenced at St. Chad's, Shrewsbury. They had the backing of Bentham, and were always attended by the Council of the Marches when it coincided with their meetings in town. Surplices and square caps were not worn, and attempts to enforce conformity proved ineffectual. The meetings came under the Elizabethan ban of 1577. Of 85 towns with combination lectures, only three were situated in the diocese. This compares with 12 in Cheshire, 5 in Lancashire, and none in 'Puritan' Essex. P.Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Houndmills, 1988), p.45; *Godly People*, p.563.

⁷⁰ 'A Puritan Survey of the Church in Staffordshire', p.348.

⁷¹ Collinson, 'Lectures by Combination', p.472. The lectures were used as an opportunity for like-minded clergymen to meet and discuss the interpretation of Scripture and, presumably, pastoral problems associated with their parochial work.

discussion and mutual edification must have been crucial in maintaining morale. This collegiality derived from the Elizabethan prophesyings. Originally clerical, they had soon acquired an enthusiastic lay audience.⁷² The meetings at Repton and Burton were either a continuation or a revival of Elizabethan prophesyings. Thomas Gataker stated that 'at these meetings one preached his hour on the Scripture propounded the meeting before. The rest, or a certain number, each one his half-hour on some other portion of Scripture'.⁷³ A moderator concluded the meeting 'with some succinct rehearsal of what had been delivered with some additments, if it seemed good, of something of his own'. Gataker added that when Bradshaw was in the chair, he was known as the 'weighing divine'.⁷⁴

The first reforming incumbent at Southam, south Warwickshire, in the early 1560s was the Swiss, Augustine Bernher, an associate of Bishop Latimer. John Oxenbridge built on his foundation, and by the 1570s the area possessed an exercise of prophesying which, according to Thomas Wood, 'was esteemed the best in the realm'.⁷⁵ After the suppression of the prophesyings they were replaced at Southam by 'fasts', when the godly gathered, undaunted, to hear a succession of sermons. These unofficial fasts were voluntary associations of like-minded believers, unlike those sanctioned by the Church, which were either ordered by the liturgical calendar or commanded by authority as fast days within the commonwealth. They were popular with some Puritans, and were a way of continuing much of what had occurred at prophesyings. In 1596, at Southam, other ministers joined Oxenbridge to lead and preach on the fast day, amongst them Henry Bradshaw of Bulkington, Ralph Fox of Coleshill and Dod of Hanwell.⁷⁶ Such occasions also enabled gifted preachers to become more widely known in the Puritan fraternity. At Wolston, Warwickshire, Samuel Clarke, the

⁷² Hunt, *Puritan Moment*, p.94.

⁷³ Clarke, *Lives of Thirty Two Divines*, p.53.

⁷⁴ *Loc. cit.*

⁷⁵ Collinson, 'Lectures by Combination', p.473; *idem* (ed.), 'Letters of Thomas Wood, Puritan, 1566-1577', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, Special Supplement v (1960), p.17.

⁷⁶ LJRO, B/C/3/3, 21 April 1576.

son of the incumbent Hugh Clarke, preached at such a gathering in the 1620s, and so impressed some Coventry aldermen that they invited him to be their lecturer.⁷⁷ Under the latitudinarian rule of Bishop Overton private meetings for exercises and ministerial conference were still allowed to take place in the diocese.⁷⁸

Meeting together at such exercises, Puritan clergy enjoyed a measure of clerical collegiality and stimulated one another pastorally, intellectually and spiritually. They were not the only forms of clerical collegiality, however; informal, domestic gatherings were also important, and less likely to attract notice. Many clerics had been introduced to this fellowship at such 'Puritan seminaries' as Emmanuel and Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge, or as part of a household seminary run by a Puritan minister. Such collegiality was sometimes promoted by lay encouragement and support, especially when ministers suffered persecution. John Ball, for instance, retreated to the Shropshire home of Lady Bromley at Sherrif Hales with his ministerial peers 'when they durst not preach'; there he met regularly with ministers such as John Taylor of Checkley, John Ford, Simeon Ashe and George Cross.⁷⁹ Sherrif Hales also provided a safe haven for Julines Herring, Thomas Pierson and others, who were introduced to the group gathered around Ball.⁸⁰ Further afield, Warwick castle, the home of Lord Brook, also acted as a haven for harassed ministers, such as Ball, Crosse and Ashe.⁸¹ As Tom Webster has shown, such coteries within the godly fraternity were of paramount importance in settling ministers. Julines Herring only moved to Holland after receiving advice from John Ball, Thomas Pierson and Josiah Nicholls in the house

⁷⁷ Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.81.

⁷⁸ British Library, *Lansdowne MS. 72*, no.49 f.138.

⁷⁹ Simeon Ashe (d.1662), was educated at Emmanuel, and later 'sat at the feet' of Arthur Hildersham. He commenced his ministry in Staffordshire, but was ejected because he refused to read the Book of Sports. Befriended by Sir John Burgoyne, who installed him in the peculiar of Wroxhall (Worcester diocese), he became chaplain to Lord Brook, and was the regular preacher at Warwick Castle until the late 1630s. Chaplain to the Earl of Manchester during the Civil War, he later became minister and lecturer in London. A leading Prebyterian, he adapted Ball's *Treatise on the Covenant of Grace* to serve the Presbyterian cause. *DNB*; Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.73; Webster, *Godly Clergy*, p.327.

⁸⁰ Webster, *Godly Clergy*, pp.130-136.

⁸¹ Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.73.

of the sympathetic Lady Bromley.⁸² Such like-minded ministerial gatherings sometimes transcended diocesan boundaries. When, in 1637, thirteen ministers gathered to respond (unsympathetically) to separatist developments in New England, the group included their spokesman, Ball, and Sherard (both from Staffordshire), as well as ministers from outside the diocese such as Ashe, Thomas Langley, John Dod and William Bourne.⁸³ Meeting together for voluntary fasting strengthened the bonds still further.

Evidence of godly fellowship can be found amongst the wills of several preachers. Puritan ministers often made bequests to fellow-clerics, indicating close contacts between them in earlier years.⁸⁴ In 1623, William Hull, curate and lecturer at Ashbourne (1605-1620), bequeathed eleven shillings to Arthur Hildersham and left five shillings each to the ministers Tailor, Brinsley and John Rowlandson of Bakewell.⁸⁵ William Dethicke, minister of Hartshorne, made Hildersham one of his executors, bequeathing to 'my faithful and approved friend Mr. Arthur Hildersham a half spurgall in gold'. To Arthur Rickards, his like-minded successor, he bequeathed 'in money five pounds with all my papers and paperbooks willing also that he shall have soe many of my books and such moveables as may stand him instead upon a reasonable price'.⁸⁶ Rickards was later made overseer of his brother-in-law Philip Ward's will. Ward had briefly been minister at Repton. 'John Porter, wealthy rector of Ashton-on-Trent was also Ward's brother-in-law and in his own will bequeathed thirty shillings to Arthur Rickards, Philip Ward and another brother-in-law, John Somerfield, the curate of West Felton, Shropshire'. Ward, Rickards and Porter were all

⁸² *Ibid.* p.36; S.Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-Two Divines*, p.165.

⁸³ N.Tyacke, 'The Future of English Puritanism', *Friends of Dr. Williams' Library* (London, 1991), 44th. Lecture, 1990, p.17.

⁸⁴ O'Day, *English Clergy*, p.163.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.164; LJRO, B/C/11, William Hull, W.P.1623. Tailor was presumably Joseph Taylor, who was his successor as Ashbourne lecturer (1624-1633). Clarke, 'List of Derbyshire Clergymen', p.31.

⁸⁶ B/C/11, William Dethicke, W.P.,1626.

participants at the Repton combination lecture, and Porter had refused to subscribe to the Three Articles in 1621.⁸⁷

As Dethicke's will suggests, not all bequests were financial. In a will proved in 1619, Roger Moulde, rector of Austrey, Warwickshire, gave 'unto Mr. Ffreeman of Orton Calvine on *the Epistle to the Ephesians*'. Alexander How of Caverswall bequeathed books to his godson Alexander Brassington, then studying at Oriel College, and gave his copy of Francis Mason's *Vindicas Ecclesia Anglicana* to 'Mr. Rideway, Preacher of God's holie Word at Milwich'.⁸⁸ These bequests of religious books suggest a spiritual bond between the testator and his beneficiaries. Unsurprisingly, considering the Puritan emphasis on godliness within the home, a number of literary bequests were also made to family members. In 1633 Henry Bradshawe of Bulkington left his books not to his sons Job and Zephaniah but to his daughter Sarah, 'to be disposed of for hir benefitt except such as hir mother will have for her private use'.⁸⁹ John Sherrard (*sic*) who had taken over the charge at Arley from his father Ralph, who had fallen foul of the church authorities, bequeathed his 'little English Bible' to his sister Symcope and 'Mr. Doddes booke on the ten commandments' to his sister Colley, '(and unto her husband Roger Colley, Mr. Southwell's booke of Poems)'. To his brother, Hope, he left two volumes to the value of twenty shillings. The remainder of his books were to be given to Manoah, another brother.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ O'Day, *The English Clergy*, pp.165;169; LJRO, B/C/11, Philip Ward W.P.1640; John Porter, W.P.1637.

⁸⁸ B/C/11, Roger Moulde, W.P. 1619; Alexander How, W.P. 1649. How came from Devon. He matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford, as a commoner, and received his M.A. in 1606. Awarded his B.D. in 1615 from Corpus Christi, he became rector of Draycot, 1614-1619 and vicar of Caverswall 1618-1649 (both Staffordshire parishes). He was made prebendary of Upton Decani in 1626. He signed the Testimony in 1648. His nephew was rector at Draycott in 1655. *CHS*, 1915.

⁸⁹ When Bradshaw's wife, Elizabeth, had made her own will the previous May she had signed it with her mark, rather than with a signature. She is an example of a woman who could read fluently but not write. See M.Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* (Cambridge, 1981), pp.35,45.

⁹⁰ B/C/11, John Sherrard, W.P.1635.

Puritan Literature

As well as treasuring 'sound' books, a number of the diocesan Puritan clergy published works of their own. This literature can be placed in one of four categories: practical, catechetical, exhortational, or polemical. Practical or devotional works sought to lead the individual to a closer walk with God.

William Fenner, briefly vicar of Sedgley, wrote *The Saints Looking-Glass, Lively Representing its Estate before God* to show 'how to get into a state of grace and how to have a good conscience'.⁹¹ *A Direction for the Weaker Sort of Christians*, by William Bradshawe, belongs in the same category, preparing the believer by self-examination to participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion.⁹²

A Treatise of Faith (1631) by John Ball, another work of practical theology, expounded the nature of faith and its application in daily life.⁹³ Richard Sibbes provided a preface, which shows how members of the local Puritan clergy retained links with the national godly fraternity which often went back to university days.⁹⁴ Referring to Ball's deprivation and straitened circumstances, Sibbes wrote that 'he is a man that hath formerly deserved well of the church, but is in a more special manner fitted for a treatise of this nature, as having been put to it, to know what it is to live by faith, having insight for matters of this life very little whereupon to depend'.⁹⁵

⁹¹ The book was published posthumously at Cambridge in 1640. Fenner's widow dedicated it to Robert, Earl of Warwick, who was 'a great favourer of Puritan divines'. See J.T.Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry* (London, 1984), p.79.

⁹² W.Bradshaw, *A Direction for the Weaker Sort of Christians, showing in what manner they ought to fit and prepare themselves for the worthy receiving of the body and blood of Christ: with a short form of trial or examination annexed by W.B.* (1609).

⁹³ John Ball, *A Treatise of Faith, Divided into 2 Parts, The first shewing the Nature and the 2nd. the life of faith both tending to direct the weak Christian how he may possess the whole Word of God as his own, overcome temptations, better his obedience and live comfortably in all estates* (London, 1631).

⁹⁴ The 'heavenly' Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) was lecturer and later vicar of Trinity Church, Cambridge. Deprived of his professorship and lectureship by High Commission in 1615, Ussher and Abbot both offered him the provostship of Trinity College, Dublin, which he turned down. From 1618 he was preacher at Gray's Inn. He was made Master of St. Catherine's Hall, Cambridge. He wrote prefaces to other Puritan works. P.Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism*, (Haywards Heath, 1975), p.23-4; *DNB*.

⁹⁵ J.Ball, *A Life of Faith*, pp.2-3.

Puritans placed great emphasis on catechetical instruction to the young in faith or understanding. Catechisms contained questions about basic doctrines, with answers from or supported by the Bible, and their popularity is evidenced by the fact that Ball's *Shorter Catechism (Without Exposition)* had reached its thirteenth impression by 1630. It was popular not only in families, but also in some congregations, where it was used in preference to the Prayer Book catechism. Ball's *A Shorter Treatise Containing All the Principle Grounds Of the Christian Religion by Way Of Questions and Answers* (1624) contained scriptural expositions which had been written at the request of his fellow clergy. The book was commended as 'very profitable for all men, but especially for householders', who 'for want of leisure or ability are prevented from studying larger and more learned treatises'. In the introduction Ball explained that part of its object was 'the confirmation of the truth professed against popery'.⁹⁶ As Ian Green has noted, Ball's shorter catechisms, like most catechetical works, tended to obscure double predestination and treated all catechumens as potential believers. Ball's popular shorter catechisms thus evidenced his concern, presumably born of pastoral experience, not to burden neophytes with things 'hard to understand'. Paradoxically, the 1630s were the 'heyday' of Calvinist catechisms, Laudian censorship of them being either mild or ineffective.⁹⁷

Exhortatory works reflected the active religion advocated by Puritan authors and often urged readers to use their influence to suppress vice and lawlessness. Typical of the genre was *The Anatomie of Conscience* (1623) by Immanuel Bourne, who, prior to its publication, had become rector of Ashover through his patron, Sir Samuel Tryon.⁹⁸ It originated in an Assize sermon at Derby, in 1623. Bourne lashed out at ambitious clergy who 'care not by what corruption' they gain advancement, and gentlemen who oppress their tenants and,

⁹⁶ I.Green, *The Christian's ABC* (Oxford, 1996), p.138; J.Ball, *A Shorter Catechism (without Exposition) Containing the Principle of Religion*, 13th. impression, 1630; J.Ball, *A Shorter Treatise Containing All the Principle Grounds of the Christian Religion* (London,1624).

⁹⁷ Green, *Christian's ABC*, pp.78,366,370.

⁹⁸ I.Bourne, *The True Way of a Christian* (London,1622), Dedication.

not content with robbing the church of 'all her ancient rights', make 'symoniacall compacts' and 'sell both themselves, their priests and people to the Devil'. He also castigated dishonest jurors who give their verdict as 'malice or affection leads them', and inferior officers, 'the life of the law', who 'for fear of greatness or love of baseness' are guilty of 'smothering vile enormities, which not being killed in time have filled the land with sins that cry out for vengeance'.⁹⁹

Edmund Rudyerd, probably lecturer at Uttoxeter, dedicated a similar work, *The Thunderbolt of God's Wrath against Hard-Hearted and Impenitent Sinners* (1618), to acquaintances who were justices of the peace.¹⁰⁰ Amongst them were Sir William Bowyer (1588-1641), of Knypersley, Staffordshire, Sir Andrew Corbet, of Moreton Corbet, Shropshire, and Sir Francis Newport. Bowyer was active in public affairs, sitting in four parliaments before the Long Parliament, where he sat on several important committees dealing with abuses of the subject and with church reform. Corbet had encouraged a godly ministry in and around Moreton Corbet in the 1580s, and later sat for Shropshire in the parliaments of 1624 and 1628. Newport (d. 1623), of High Ercall, Shropshire, was 'one of the county's leading magistrates and probably its richest gentleman'.¹⁰¹ Rudyerd intended his book to be:

a shrill watch-bell daylie in your eares to waken and stirre you up more carefully to look into the weightie and burdensome charge that lyeth upon you, as you are publique magistrates, and also to your private duties as you are ministers of families, in both which callings you are most deeply bound to be carefull.

Divided into two sections, corresponding to the two tables of the Moral

⁹⁹ I. Bourne, *The Anatomie of Conscience* (London, 1623), pp.18-9.

¹⁰⁰ 'Sir Vincent Corbet, Sir Francis Newport, Sir Thomas Smith, Sir Richard Lee, Sir Richard Huffey, Sir Andrew Corbet, Sir William Bowyer and to their religious ladies and to my dearly beloved in the Lord, Anthony Kinnersley, Thomas Rudyerd, William Millward and their affectionate wives'. Thomas Rudyerd (died 1626) owned the advowson at Leek.

¹⁰¹ M.F. Keeler, *The Long Parliament* (Philadelphia, 1954), p.113; Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, p.165; R.C. Johnson and M.J. Cole (eds.), *The Commons Debates 1628* (New Haven, 1977), vol. 2, p.308; Keeler, Cole and W.B. Bidwell (eds.), *The Commons Debates 1628* (1978), vol.4, p.128; V.C.H., *Shropshire*, vol.11, p.97.

Law, the book contains fearsome accounts of the judgments meted out to sinners, taken from the Scriptures, classical authors and European history, with more modern examples drawn from Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Inveighing against the evils of cards, dice and gaming, Rudyerd was unperturbed that 'those that speak against such things [are] called Puritans and precisians'. The mightiest monarchs must obey the laws of God, and Rudyerd quoted Pliny with approval: 'A prince is not set over the Law, but the Law above him'. Princes and magistrates were bound to punish offenders against the laws of God and kingdom, and he prayed that 'God grant all men in authority to have care and conscience to do their duties for the suppression of wickedness and vice, and maintenance of virtue'.¹⁰²

Polemical literature, the fourth category, is represented by John Burges's *An Answer* and some of the writings of Bradshaw. Burges set out to show the reasonableness of subscription, and did so as a man who had come to a conformist position only after considerable personal struggle. His was a moderate approach to the controversy; he wished to convince his opponents but did not want them to be punished for their non-conformity and condemned the 'pressing the utmost rigour of the Lawes against all that refute Conformitie', believing it would only confirm non-conformists in their practices. He urged the value of reasoned and scriptural arguments, as put forward in his book, a riposte to critics Morton's *A Defence of the Innocency of the Three Ceremonies of the Church of England*.¹⁰³

William Bradshaw's *A Proposition of Kneeling in the Very Act of Receiving* came from a far more radical position on the polemical spectrum, and was published anonymously in Amsterdam in 1605. Bradshaw endeavoured to show the error of kneeling to receive the sacrament. Holding that it was without warrant, and an institution of man, he maintained that kneeling without respect of 'reverence' was a mockery of God. Like other Puritans, he feared that the

¹⁰² E. Rudyerd, *The Thunderbolt of God's Wrath* (London, 1618), pp.3,4,79,97.

¹⁰³ Burges, *An Answer* pp.9-11.

implementation of unscriptural principles could easily lead those weak in the faith (i.e. the ill-educated, the young, the badly-taught, the simple) into apostasy.¹⁰⁴

Bradshaw's *English Puritanism* was also published in 1605. Ostensibly written to show the main tenets of 'the rigidest of those that are called Puritans', the book privileges a form of independency inimical to moderate Puritans. After emphasising the perfection of Scripture, and its sole authority in all matters of faith and practice, Bradshaw contended that every assembly uniting to worship God in the way sanctioned by the Bible is a true visible church. True churches communicating together 'are in all ecclesiastical matters equal', and should therefore have the same spiritual privileges, prerogatives, officers, administrators, orders and forms of worship. Each church was to have a resident minister as well as the spiritual officers enjoined in the New Testament, with the power to elect them. 'It is a greater wrong to have such forced upon them against their wills, than if they should force upon men wives, or upon women husbands against their will and liking'. Pluralism was evil and national, provincial or diocesan pastors, to whom local ministers were subject, possessed no biblical warrant.¹⁰⁵ Elders were necessary to guard the flock, and they alone were entrusted with the spiritual keys of the Church. They had the responsibility for local church discipline, rather than the church courts, which Bradshaw castigated for their lack of privacy and discretion, and their practice of public humiliation.

Despite his radical position, Bradshaw stopped short of urging secession from the established Church. Indeed, he published a number of works refuting the separatist position. In 1614 he wrote *The Unreasonableness of Separation* in

¹⁰⁴ 'Anon.', *A Proposition of Kneeling in the Very Act of Receiving* (Amsterdam, 1605), see pp. 22, 12, 14 and 49-50.

¹⁰⁵ 'Anon.', *English Puritanism* (Amsterdam, 1605), pp. 5-7. The radical nature of the work continues in the sections headed 'Ministers of the Word' and 'the Censures of the Church'. According to Bradshaw the most exalted work of the pastor is to preach the gospel to his congregation. To do this certain exegetical rules are to be followed. Ignorant or 'sole reading priests' are not acknowledged as pastors. In an attack on the prescribed liturgy of the Church, Bradshaw claims that Puritans hold the pastor to be the only mouthpiece of the congregation in prayer. There is to be 'no Babylonish confusion for the pastor to say one piece of prayer, and the people with mingled voices to say another' (p. 20).

response to two works of Francis Johnson against the Church of England.¹⁰⁶

Johnson had maintained that it was a sin to remain within the Church; Bradshaw replied that it was a sin to separate, and wrote to guide others from the way of separation and ‘to lend him a hand which knoweth not well which way to take’.¹⁰⁷ According to Bradshaw, the established Church contained assemblies, freed from Antichrist, which were joined together in the gospel by voluntary profession, which made them, despite their many imperfections, sufficient visible churches. Johnson had pointed to the difference between New Testament church officers and those within the state church, but Bradshaw countered by claiming that all the New Testament offices were to be found in the contemporary church, and that the plethora of ecclesiastical titles had arisen from ‘that variety of maintenance that is in our Churches and not of their spiritual offices’. It was a case of form and content: unscriptural titles did not negate the reality of gifted, biblically-sanctioned, ministries which were to be found in the established Church. Johnson had asked if the calling to, entrance into and maintenance of the ministry of the Church of England be ‘the manner’ of calling, entrance and maintenance appointed by Christ. Bradshaw replied in the affirmative: ‘many (at the least) that are called into ecclesiastical offices, are in very effect and substance the same, that Christ has appointed’. The essence of the offices and functions of the New Testament ministry was to be found within the established Church and it was therefore lawful for Biblical Christians to worship there. It was within this Church that Bradshaw, although suspended from its regular ministry, sought to place himself. The same could be said of all but a tiny fraction of Puritan ministers within the diocese.

¹⁰⁶ W. Bradshaw, *The Unreasonableness of the Separation, made Apparent by an Examination of Mr. Johnson’s pretended reasons published in 1608, whereby he laboureth to justify his Schisms from the Church Assemblies of England* (Dort, 1614). Johnson had collaborated with Henry Ainsworth in 1604 to produce *An Apology or defence of Such True Christians as are commonly called Brownists*. He had later produced *Certain Reasons and Arguments proving that it is not Lawful to Hear the Present Ministry of the Church of England* (Amsterdam, 1608).

¹⁰⁷ Bradshaw, *The Unreasonableness of Separation*, A3.

Peter Lake's comments about moderate Puritanism in the Elizabethan church also apply to attitudes found in the work of authors in the Lichfield diocese in the period 1603-1640.¹⁰⁸ Lake contends that 'the divide in the Elizabethan church between an out-and-out non-conformist and a moderate semi-conformist (or presbyterian and non-presbyterian) was not necessarily crucial'. Amongst men who recognised the sincerity and zeal of each other's protestantism such divisions were not of primary importance. At the core of moderate Puritanism lay 'the capacity which the godly claimed of being able to recognise one another' in an unregenerate world. Resting on the foundation of reformed doctrine as the basis of personal spiritual experience and of the collective experience and activity of the godly community, the heart of Puritanism was an 'insistence on the transformative effect of the word on the attitudes of all true believers'.¹⁰⁹ This runs through all the literature under discussion, from John Ball's catechism to William Bradshaw's controversial *A Proposition of Kneeling in the Very Act of Receiving*. All these authors, despite their differences, were of one mind regarding the 'experience of true justifying faith, and the consequent integration of the individual into the community of the godly, and the separation of that community, in the view of its members at least, from the profane and ungodly'.¹¹⁰

Lay Puritans and Patronage

Shifting the focus from the clergy, the chapter now considers the Puritan laity, its patronage and piety. Rosemary O'Day has observed that there is little evidence in parts of the diocese of a significant lay Puritan movement. There were several patrons who possessed small groups of livings which were of

¹⁰⁸ Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church*, pp.266-67.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.282-83.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* The same attitude can be found in the writings of the Derbyshire preacher, William Bagshawe, 'the apostle of the Peak'. In 1702 he published *De Spiritualibus Peccis*, his reminiscences of the godly in the neighbourhood of the Peak in the preceding sixty years. Of John Rowlandson, the painful incumbent of Bakewell in the 1620s and 1630s, Bagshawe states, 'Tho' my Principles have led me to suffer as a Nonconformist...yet...I heartily bless God for the great good done by those that conform...' Bagshawe, *De Spiritualibus Peccis*, p.10.

'advantage to the Puritan cause', but no local figure equivalent to the Earl of Warwick in Essex. Warwick held 22 advowsons, and used his influence to protect and promote godly preachers.¹¹¹ By contrast, Sir Francis Leeke, later Earl of Scarsdale, held only six advowsons in the archdeaconry of Derby, which he too used to favour Puritan clergy.¹¹² Other patrons with a similar level of influence were Sir Philip Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, the Puritan Earls Herbert of Pembroke, the Earls of Devonshire, the Earl of Bridgwater, and the Levesons, Corbets and Screvins.¹¹³ The patronage of Lady Bromley of Coventry (d.1622) extended beyond the confines of the diocese. She was concerned to provide preachers in those parts of the country where she perceived there to be a great need, and placed ministers in the Peak District (among them Dyke and Tyler) and in the North.¹¹⁴ Lady Bromley also had an estate in the Barnard Castle area, where she placed and maintained Richard Rothwell (1563-1627), formerly chaplain to the Earl of Devonshire. 'She gave about £100 per annum to maintain preachers where there were none nor any means for them, and all her preachers were men silenced by reason of non-conformity'.¹¹⁵

A patron with only one or two advowsons might still be influential.

O'Day has emphasised that the scale of ownership mattered less than the number of opportunities available to the patron to present. She cites Viscount Mansfield

¹¹¹ O'Day, *English Clergy*, p.87; Hunt, *Puritan Moment*, pp.102-104.

¹¹² The livings were Alfretton, Mickleover, Pleasley, Scarcliffe, Sutton-cum-Duckmanton and Tibshelf. Elisha Bourne, brother to Immanuel, was assistant at Mickleover, Francis Tallents, the uncle and guardian of his better-known name-sake Francis (ejected in 1662), was given the living of Tibshelf, and John Bayes was rector of Pleasley (1627-1651). Bayes was a conformist. According to Dugdale, Leeke suffered much during the Interregnum. The execution of Charles affected him so much that 'he apparelled himself in sackcloth and causing his grave to be digged some years before his death laid himself down in it every Friday, exercising himself in divine meditation and prayer'. He died at Sutton on April 9th. 1655. O'Day, *English Clergy*, pp. 6-7; A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 474-5; J.Venn and J.A.Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1922), Part 1, i, p.111; W. Dugdale, *The Baronage of England* (London, 1675-6), vol.2, p.450.

¹¹³ John Shaw (1608-1672), later lecturer at Brampton, Derbyshire and at Hull, from whence he was ejected in 1662, was, early in his career, chaplain to Philip, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery; Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, iv, p.52; For Sir Andrew Corbet, see above p.107.

¹¹⁴ Bagshawe, *De Spiritualibus Peccis*, p.6.

¹¹⁵ S.Gower, *Life of Richard Rothwell* (Bolton, 1787), pp.172-3; Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-Two Divines*, p.69.

who, with only one advowson, presented to it on four occasions in six years. 'A patron who never had an opportunity to present to the living in his gift was of little use to any movement'.¹¹⁶ In 1622, the Sleights of Ash (Derbyshire) held two advowsons. They appointed Roger Jackson to their living at Sutton-on-the-Hill and Joseph Swetnam to Dalbury.¹¹⁷ Humphrey Dethicke held the patronage to the living at Hartshorne. His Puritan son William held the living until 1624, when Sir Francis Coke and Henry Curzon purchased the grant of next presentation in order to bestow it on Arthur Rickards, an 'outspoken Puritan'. The rectory and other property proceeded from William Dethicke to his sister, Katherine, the wife of Alexander Redich, and the advowson eventually passed to her elder daughter, Grace, who conveyed it to her husband, Sir Robert Darcy of Dartford.¹¹⁸

The relationship between patron and cleric was often mutually beneficial. Sometimes the patron provided the minister with accommodation within his household as a domestic chaplain, or protection from the authorities, in return for pastoral care. Lord Brook of Warwick (who appointed the non-conformist Simeon Ashe as his chaplain) and Lady Bromley of Sherrif Hales both provided protection to those who had fallen foul of the ecclesiastical authorities.¹¹⁹ After being suspended from Chatham, William Bradshaw was commended to Alexander Redich of New Hall by Arthur Hildersham, their mutual friend. Redich and his wife Katherine received Bradshaw into their home, where Bradshaw found 'both the gentleman and his wife very tender-hearted, so kind to him'.¹²⁰ As well as fulfilling spiritual responsibilities elsewhere, Bradshaw led family prayer and

¹¹⁶ O'Day, *English Clergy*, p.87.

¹¹⁷ Swetnam a Presbyterian in the interregnum, took up arms for Parliament in the Civil War, See chapter 8, p.294. Calamy records that 'forseeing the commencement of that Act at Bartholomew's Day, he thought good to make a mixtly voluntary Secession sometime before its taking place and so was not, and yet was expelled by it. Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, p.471.

¹¹⁸ O'Day, *English Clergy*, p.99.

¹¹⁹ See above, pp.102-103.

¹²⁰ Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-Two Divines*, p.43.

spent much time trying to resolve the anxieties of the Rediches' elder daughter, Grace.¹²¹

Similarly, Edward Mainwaring entertained John Ball (1588-1640) at his house at Whitmore, near Newcastle-under-Lyme, from 1610 and later built him a house. Ball expounded scripture to his patron's family every evening and sometimes in the morning. His pastoral skills were utilised and refined by his responsibilities: 'His ability to counsel and comfort dejected, tempted Christians was occasioned by Mistress Sarah Mainwaring who was much exercised in that kind, and was an unparalleled gentlewoman for holy tenderness and exactness in religion'.¹²²

The Feoffees for Improvements and Other Lay Patronage

Puritan patronage in the diocese did not rest solely in the hands of the local aristocracy and gentry. In the period 1625-1633 a group known as the Feoffees (trustees) for Improvements also played an important part in encouraging and facilitating Puritan preaching throughout the country. This group consisted of a number of Puritan clergy and laity who, in 1625, banded together in an attempt to increase the strength of the Puritan faction within the Church of England by buying advowsons and impropriated tithes which they used to raise the stipends of painful preachers.¹²³ In 1633 the group was suppressed by Laud, who saw the scheme as a lay attack on the government of the Church.

The last of the Feoffees to be elected was Rowland Heylin (1562?-1631). Heylin, a native of Shrewsbury, had moved to London, where he eventually

¹²¹ See W. Bradshaw, *A Direction for the Weaker Sort of Christians*, preface. These instructions on the manner in which such believers should prepare themselves for the reception of the sacrament were dedicated 'to the virtuous Lady Darcy'. Initially the notes had been prepared by Bradshaw for her private use. On his arrival at the Rediches' home, Lady Ferrers, Katherine's mother, was not in sympathy with Bradshaw's painful religion, but he overcame this prejudice to such an extent that when visiting her daughter she joined in family prayers. Bradshaw's tact in handling Lady Ferrers bore further fruit both in her granting a lease to the Rediches and also consenting to build a house for Bradshaw and his wife. Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-Two Divines*, p.47.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.149.

¹²³ K. Fincham, 'Archbishop Laud', in *idem* (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church* (Basingstoke, 1993), pp. 51-70.

became an alderman and Sheriff.¹²⁴ He was a practitioner of painful religion and zealous in its promulgation.¹²⁵ Like a number of others who made their fortunes in the capital, Heylin was concerned about the spiritual and practical well-being of his place of birth. In his will, he bequeathed £300 to the Corporation of Shrewsbury to be held in trust for the poor. In 1628, as a gift to the Feoffees, he presented the advowson to the vicarage of St. Alkmund's and the lease to the tithes pertaining to St. Mary's (both Shrewsbury parishes).¹²⁶ The grant of St. Alkmund's, which had been made to Heylin by the Crown, stipulated that the incumbent (Thomas Lloyd) be paid thirty pounds a year. Lloyd was not a preacher, and since 1618 the preaching had been undertaken by Julines Herring, who gave a Tuesday morning lecture in the Church, as well as preaching at one o'clock on Sunday afternoons 'in order not to interfere with the regular services.'¹²⁷ On the Sunday evening Herring repeated his sermon in the house of a friend.

Other supporters of the reformed faith, living in the diocese, sought to increase the number of local preachers by utilising the Feoffees organisation. Through the gift of Sir William Whitmore, who held property in Bridgnorth, the feoffees acquired the right to nominate, and the resources to maintain, a preacher or curate in the town, and a curate at All Saints', Claverley (Shropshire).¹²⁸ In 1632, accounts made by the Feoffees shows that £217 10s. had been spent from

¹²⁴ I.M.Calder, 'A Seventeenth Century Attempt to Purify the Church', *American Historical Review*, 53 (1947-1948), pp.760-775; *DNB*.

¹²⁵ In 1630 he published a portable Welsh Bible at his own expense; he also promoted a Welsh translation of *The Practice of Piety* by Lewis Bayly, the Bishop of Bangor.

¹²⁶ With the lease was included a barn at Cotton, in the nearby parish of Croxall. I.M.Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction of the Church of England, 1625-1633* (London, 1957), p.xvi.

¹²⁷ Calder, 'Attempt to Purify the Church', pp. 769-70; 'During his stay at Shrewsbury, he and his large family' appear to have lived in a hall rented from the Draper's Company for four pounds a year.

¹²⁸ Whitmore had paid £500 to John Geering, the treasurer of the Feoffees, and agreed to convey to them 'the (nomynacion free) disposicion of a preacher at Bridgenorth and of a curate at Claverley in the countie of Salop for ever and that some of the said defendants have in (consideracion thereof agreed and undertaken to make) vpp the severall stippends of ffive pounds per annum before allowed to the said preacer and curate respectveli fiftie pounds a yeare to each of them forever..' Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction*, pp.11/2; from the extant records of the lawsuit between the feoffees, their 'Associate collector and liveried servant and the Crown before the equity side of the Court of Exchequer in the years 1632-3'.

Whitmore's gift, over a two and a half year period, to support a preacher at Bridgnorth and a curate at Claverley. The curate at Claverley, Gilbert Walden, had had his stipend increased to fifty pounds per annum.¹²⁹

In 1633, the Feoffees noted that 'the Lease of the Tythes of Kinvar in Staffordshire, and the nominacion on the curate there, and the Schoolemaster there, This was gained, but without money out of the stock, They of the towne desired to have a good preacher and a schoolemaster they gave and secured 50li. a yeare by the said Lease etc. as appears by the deeds thereof.'¹³⁰

During the period 1625-1633 the Feoffees disbursed £8,073 9s. 1d. in pursuit of their goals. Apart from the instances already considered, monies used in Coventry and Lichfield went to acquire a lease of glebe land and tithes in Stafford, Lichfield and Williford, Staffordshire, at a cost of £165; the right of next presentation to the rectory of St. Martin's, Birmingham, purchased in 1629 for £100; a lease of the nomination of the curate of St. Martin's Tipton, with his maintenance; and the advowson to the vicarage of St. John the Baptist, Mayfield, Staffordshire.¹³¹ Isobel Calder has observed that the purchase of impropriations did not necessarily imply their return to the parishes themselves; rather they would go towards the maintenance of painful preachers and schoolmasters, wherever the need might arise. The activities of the trustees within Coventry and Lichfield appear, in the main, to have been used in supplying ministers of the gospel to an area in which they were perceived to be in short supply. In 1633, the Court of the Exchequer charged the feoffees with acting illegally, invading the prerogative of the King and planning to gain control of the Church.¹³² The scheme was declared illegal, and in the period 1633-1640 an attempt was made to return the

¹²⁹Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction*, pp.xvi, 40; Calder, 'Attempt to Purify the Church,' p.768, fn; *V.C.H., Shropshire*, vol.2, p.142. Bobington, Bridgnorth St. Mary's and St. Leonard's and Claverley were all part of the College of Bridgnorth, which was a peculiar.

¹³⁰ Calder, *Activities of the Puritan Faction*, p.87.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.xvi, xvii.

¹³² E.W.Kirby, 'The Lay Feoffees: A Study in Militant Puritanism', *The Journal of Modern History*, 14:1 (1942), p.19.

impropriations to their rightful parishes.¹³³ Notwithstanding official proscription, during the short life-span of the Feoffees several parishes within Coventry and Lichfield had been affected by their efforts to secure a more significant Puritan presence. This was, in part, the result of lay influence within the diocese, whether individual, in the case of Heylin (and Whitmore), or by a 'pressure group' in Kinver.

Municipal and personal patronage was also utilised by Puritan laymen and clergy to further their cause. John Tomkys, who as town preacher at Shrewsbury had been supported by the Corporation, stipulated in his will, proved in 1592, that if his children died, their individual inheritances should go towards establishing sermons at Wolverhampton and Bilston, and to augment the stipend of the Shrewsbury town preacher. His position was taken by William Bright, a fellow of Emmanuel College, who remained public preacher and curate at St. Mary's until 1618. He and his successor were paid a yearly salary of £46 13s 4d.¹³⁴ Around the time of his death, Julines Herring was appointed to a lectureship at St. Alkmund's, in the town.¹³⁵ At Coventry, the city aldermen restored St. John's church, establishing a weekly lecture, sometimes delivered by the former minister of Southam, John Oxenbridge. By the mid 1620s, lectures were held on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Lecturers included Humphrey Fenn and, briefly, Josiah Slader.¹³⁶ The corporation also employed two assistant ministers to preach at St. Michael's and Holy Trinity. Darren Oldridge has observed that these lectureships were less controversial than at St. John's, 'probably because the beneficed clergy were able to debar more radical preachers from their pulpits'. When Samuel Clarke was invited to lecture in these pulpits by Coventry

¹³³ In 1646 the Commons ordered that the books of the Feoffees be returned to them, that they might continue their work.

¹³⁴ O'Day, 'Clerical Patronage and Recruitment in England in the Elizabethan and Early Stuart Periods' (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1972), pp.184-187.

¹³⁵ See above, pp.93-94.

¹³⁶ Coventry City Record Office, Corp. Minute Book A14b f173v; C.C.R.O., city annals A48, p.392. In his will of 1659, Slader claimed that, amongst his charges, he had ministered at Pyworthy (Devon), Coventry, Knowle, Birmingham and Broughton. He asserted that he had been 'driven from all by the bishops'. *V.C.H., Warwickshire*, vol.vii, p.411.

Corporation, he was refused permission by the conformist incumbent, Samuel Buggs, with the support of Bishop Morton. As a consequence, Clarke's lecture was transferred to St. John's.¹³⁷ Other parliamentary boroughs within the diocese which possessed lectures were Derby, Stafford, Tamworth and Bridgnorth.¹³⁸ In 1608, at Ashbourne, Derbyshire, money was bequeathed by a Barbary merchant to support a preacher. This was supplemented in 1631 by a combination of local people and London citizens with local connections, who raised £400 to purchase an annuity of £40 for the maintenance of an 'able, pious, painful, learned and orthodox preacher'. The third incumbent, after Joseph Taylor, was John Hieron.¹³⁹ In Birmingham, Hester Jennens, a member of a wealthy iron-mongering family, promised £10 a year towards the upkeep of a painful preacher. Writing to her brother, she expressed the hope that her fellow townspeople would also contribute to the cause, 'thereby stirring up hearts of all good Christians, mayntayning the good of the church and gayninge souls for heaven'.¹⁴⁰ It was at these lectures that Thomas Hall, curate at King's Norton, heard 'those learned Gamaliels, your reverend lecturers, Dr. Burgess, Mr. Slader, Mr. Grent and Mr. Atkins'.¹⁴¹ There was also a lecture at Nuneaton at which Richard Vines and other Puritans ministered.¹⁴² At West Bromwich, the lord of the manor and churchwardens, dissatisfied with a succession of incumbents, set up a trust to support a lecturer to preach on Sundays. At Brampton, Derbyshire, John Shaw was appointed lecturer in 1630. He later reported that Morton was suspicious of his youth and reluctant license him, but that he so impressed the Bishop that he

¹³⁷ Clarke, *Lives of Thirty-Two Divines*, p.9.

¹³⁸ *DNB*, s.v. John Crompton; *C.H.S.*, 1915, pp.77,247; SP 16/261/83,84. (from Seaver); see above, pp.115-116.

¹³⁹ O'Day, *English Clergy*, p.102; Cox, J.C., *The Churches of Derbyshire* (Chesterfield, 1877), vol ii, p.398; *ibid.*, vol. iii, p.53.

¹⁴⁰ Birmingham Central Reference Library, MS 1098/119.

¹⁴¹ T.Hall, *The Font Guarded* (1652).

¹⁴² Thomas Jarcombe, *Enoch's Walk and Change* (1656); Brook, *Lives of the Puritans*, iii, p.230.

was granted a licence to preach anywhere in the diocese, without requiring any subscription.¹⁴³

Puritan Inter-Marriage

Like Catholics who married within the faith, it was common for Puritan gentry to marry 'in the Lord'. One such was Sir John Curzon (1599-1687), of Kedleston, Derbyshire, described as 'a great Presbyterian' in 1662.¹⁴⁴ Curzon, with Patience, his wife, was a dedicatee of Robert Cleaver's *A Declaration of the Christian Sabbath* (1625), along with his Puritan relatives, John Crewe, his wife's brother, (the son of Sir Thomas Crewe, the Northamptonshire lawyer) and Edward Stephens of Little Sodbury, Gloucestershire, and their wives. Cleaver had made choice of them 'for my speciall and selected Readers' and commended them 'as professed friends to the cause wherein I deale and Religious observers of that sacred Ordinance of God for which I contend'.¹⁴⁵

Curzon's mother, Millicent Sacheverell, had previously been married to Thomas Gell. Their son, John Gell of Hopton (1593-1671), later leader of the Parliamentary forces in Derbyshire, was married at the age of fifteen to Elizabeth, the daughter of Sir Perceval Willoughby, of Woolaton, Nottinghamshire.¹⁴⁶ Both Gell and his wife were numbered among the godly. A paper survives, apparently by Gell, with brief comments on three controversial topics. One dealt with a preacher's 'call' to his ministry: a man's ability to stand before a congregation and expound scripture does not necessarily imply that he has received this call, 'for you must rather leave the arke to slake as it shall please God than put

¹⁴³ V.C.H. Staffs., vol. xvii, p.16; J.Shaw, *Memorials of Master John Shaw*. According to Clarke, the story is belied by the existence of Shaw's subscription in January 1632, in Morton's register. Clarke, 'List of Derbyshire Clergymen', p.32; LJRO, B/A/4/16.

¹⁴⁴ S.C.Newton, 'The Gentry of Derbyshire in the Seventeenth Century,' *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 86 (1966), pp.1-30; J.T.Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry* (London, 1984).p.85-6. Curzon became M.P. for Blackley, was Sheriff in 1637 and subsequently became a member of Parliament for Derbyshire, 1640-1648. During the 1640s he was active on a number of committees, including those for Sequestration(1643) and the Sale of Bishops Lands(1646).

¹⁴⁵ Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry*, p.41.

¹⁴⁶ R.Slack, *Man at War, John Gell in his Troubled Time* (Nottingham, 1997), p.8.

unworthie hands to hold it up, and when we are in God's temple we are warned rather to put our hands upon our mouthes than to offer up the sacrifice of fools'.¹⁴⁷ His wife's godliness is attested by a sermon on suffering, which she painstakingly copied.¹⁴⁸ Their religion was successfully imparted to their son, John Gell (1613-1689). Educated at Magdalen Hall, under John Wilkinson, the Puritan principal, Gell was taught by a number of like-minded tutors. He later married Katherine, the daughter of John Packer of Castle Donnington, Berkshire.¹⁴⁹ Described in the 1662 gentry list as 'the most Rigid Presbit[erian] in th[a]t County', both the younger Gell and his wife were the objects of a later eulogy by William Bagshawe.¹⁵⁰

Sir Samuel Sleigh (1603-1679), the son of Gervase Sleigh, of Ash, Derbyshire, was described by an enemy in 1662 as, 'suitable to Curson, if not worse'. He was educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, under William Chappel, whom the Puritan minister John Shaw regarded as 'a very accute learned man and a most painfull and vigilant Tutor'. In 1628, the clergyman Robert Bolton wrote to Arthur Hildersham asking about Sleigh's 'outward and spiritual' state, on behalf of his niece, Judith, the daughter of Edward Boyes, a Puritan gentleman from Kent. 'It seems likely that Hildersham had no hesitation in rendering a favourable report on him; at all events a marriage was shortly arranged between Sleigh and Judith Boyes'.¹⁵¹ Sleigh's younger brother, Gervase (1608-1641), whose godliness is attested by a book of sermon notes and meditations, married Elizabeth, Judith's sister.¹⁵² Alexander Redich of New Hall married Katherine,

¹⁴⁷ Derbyshire Record Office, D258/36/41/1. Slack also mentions two other evidences of Gell's religion: two small books of sermon notes, D258/64/36 and some New Testament texts, from which the writer has drawn spiritual applications, D258/31/21. The writing appears to be of two different hands.

¹⁴⁸ DRO, D258/41/2.

¹⁴⁹ Newton, 'Gentry of Derbyshire', p.22.

¹⁵⁰ PRO, SP 29/66 no.35; Bagshawe, *De Spiritualibus Peccis*, pp.56-61. Gell is praised, for instance, for maintaining his 'closet religion' even at the busiest times, and for his enthusiasm for household devotions. His wife's godliness is attested- a 'blessed couple' in Bagshawe's estimation.

¹⁵¹ Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry*, pp.99 and 66.

¹⁵² Venn and Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, iv, p.90.

the sister of William Dethicke, the Puritan minister of Hartshorne, Derbyshire. Her sympathy to painful religion is shown by her succour of the Bradshaw's family after his death, and by her support of his eldest son at grammar school and 'in part at university'. She was also described as 'a dear friend' of Hildersham.¹⁵³ After the death of his first wife, Richard Baxter's father, Richard, of Eaton Constantine, Shropshire, married Mary, the daughter of Sir Thomas Hunkes, 'whose Holiness, Mortification, Contempt for the World, and fervent Prayer (in which she spent a great part of her Life) have been so exceeding exemplary, as made her a special Blessing to our Family, an Honour to Religion, and an honourable Pattern to those that knew her'.¹⁵⁴

Gentry Spirituality

Evidence of lay spirituality is hard to come by, except where there are personal letters, diaries or meditations, such as Gell's thoughts on the calling to the ministry. Incidental evidence, such as sermon notes and copying, is more abundant. An example of the type of sermons which godly members of the laity read or listened to, can be found in a book of sermons written down by Gervase Sleigh. The second son of Gervase Sleigh of Ashe, Sutton-in-the-Field, Derbyshire, he was admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1623, at the age of fifteen, received his M.A. in 1630, and was admitted to Gray's Inn in 1628. He was later ordained, and became rector of Radbourne, Derbyshire, in 1634, dying in 1641. The book includes sermon notes, with a meditation on preparing to receive the sacrament written by Sleigh himself. The handwriting varies, sometimes neat, sometimes untidy, suggesting that Sleigh both transcribed notes from sermons he had heard or read, and also wrote notes during sermons. It is likely that the book contains preaching that Sleigh would have heard at Cambridge, Derbyshire and London.¹⁵⁵ A number of the sermons are by Dr. Hall,

¹⁵³ Clarke, *Lives of Thirty Two Divines* pp.57 and 122.

¹⁵⁴ Sylvester (ed.), *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, Book 1, p.12.

¹⁵⁵ DRO 286 M/F 11.

who later became Bishop of Exeter.¹⁵⁶ There are others by Genning, Chappell, Tompson (sic), Geffrey, at least three by Preston and one by Arthur Hildersham. Notes of sermons by Preston and Hildersham bear evidence that they were taken down as they were preached,¹⁵⁷ an indication that a significant proportion of the book was written before Sleigh entered the ministry.¹⁵⁸ The sermons reflect the painful preaching popular amongst the godly. Preachers urged the faithful not to rest content with outward religious observance; they must have a faith which involved self-examination and the mortification of improper desires and thoughts. The Christian way was portrayed as constant warfare against the world, the flesh and the Devil. Even after conversion, the preachers taught, a sinful nature still resided in the regenerate. Liberty from indwelling sin would only be experienced in the glorified state, after death. In this world, the believer's religion was to be active, both with regard to himself, and to others. In performing his public responsibilities he must promote godliness to the best of his ability.

What Sleigh wrote down, he endeavoured to practise. The book contains some careful instructions, 'Directions for the profitable receivinge of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper', which are unattributed and therefore presumably by him.¹⁵⁹ These deal with his relationships with his God and his neighbour. The sacrament was only to be taken if he was in walking in charity with friend and enemy alike. The book also contains a further example of Sleigh's 'ethical rigorism'.¹⁶⁰ He lists twenty-one points of 'speciall matters to meditate upon privately when we have noe other more speciall matters to occupye ourselves in,

¹⁵⁶ Joseph Hall was made bishop of Exeter in 1627.

¹⁵⁷ The writing is very untidy; there are repetetions; the sermon by Hildersham is accompanied with an ink blot.

¹⁵⁸ Preston died in 1628 and Hildersham in 1631. Hildersham had been given a licence to preach in the dioceses of London and Coventry and Lichfield by Ridley, Archbishop Abbot's Vicar-General, in 1625 (in 1616 he had been presented at High Commission as a schismatic, and sentenced, imprisoned and fined). He was suspended again in 1630, for not wearing the surplice. Restored on 2nd. August, 1631, he died in the following December. It is very probable that Sleigh heard Hildersham in Coventry and Lichfield prior to 1630, i.e. before he went into the ministry.

¹⁵⁹ They also follow his notes taken down during a sermon by Hildersham, and therefore likely to have been written before he entered the ministry.

¹⁶⁰ P.Lake, ' "A Charitable Christian Hatred": the Godly and their Enemies in the 1630s', in Durston and Eales, *Culture of English Puritanism* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp.145-183.

for our good: and that in the morninge as our first worke, for a quarter of an houre, takinge them orderly as they are set downe or else such as be meetest for our severall wantes, adjoining hearty prayer with them for gods blessing herin'.¹⁶¹ He exhorts himself, after hearing the word preached, to the duty of 'conferringe therof with some faithful bretheren.' Point thirteen reminds Sleigh to 'acquainte ourselves to marke the departure of man out of this world, his end and the end of all things on earth with their vanities, the more to contemn the world and to continue our longinge after the life to come'. This was a Puritan preoccupation. The wife of Robert Cryer (rector of Glossop, 1620-c.1642), despite experiencing considerable pain, felt she needed something more visual to remind her of her mortality. She therefore 'procur'd a coffin to be made and brought that it might be often in her Eye'. When it arrived, however, Cryer said to his wife, 'well you think you shall be buried in this coffin, but it must serve to lay me in' - words which proved prophetic.¹⁶²

Sleigh's notes reveal, too, the reforming nature of early Stuart Puritanism. The godly wanted to change the world, and 'beat down sin'. Ministers, parents and masters must all play their part in this warfare.¹⁶³ 'As to drawing others to God,' declared Chappell the preacher, magistrates 'must consider what love they have to God by exercising their authority, but I thinke it was never worse than now, for shopes stand open upon the Saboath day, but if a bribe come then they needes must listen to that, so indeede they make their bribe their god.'¹⁶⁴ Rudyerd and Bourne delivered the same message.¹⁶⁵

The painful religion posited in Sleigh's book is generally conformist. One of Hall's sermons defends the blessing of the cup at Communion. This is 'not to

¹⁶¹ DRO, 286 M/F 11, no pagination. Amongst his meditations are 'that we look dayly for the cominge of our Lord Jesus Christe for our full redemption' and 'that we alwayes make some perfectinge in religion by hearing the word preached, by preparing ourselves before we heare, by diligent attending when we heareafterwards of it'.

¹⁶² Bagshawe, *De Spiritualibus Peccis*, p.20.

¹⁶³ DRO, 286 M/F 11, p.36.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.43.

¹⁶⁵ See Bourne, *The Anatomie of Conscience*, Rudyerd, *The Thunderbolt of God's Wrath*. See pp.106-108.

praise it', but to separate it from a common use to a more special one. Gadding to sermons is also discouraged. This is a religion centred around the parish church. A sermon by Chappell declares, 'Here churchwardens may see [in] their love of God they must exercise their authority to the utmost. One private Christian must labour to procure the love of God in others'.¹⁶⁶

The practice of copying printed sermons was not uncommon among the godly. Lady Elizabeth Gell, the wife of Sir John Gell (1593-1671) of Hopton, Derbyshire, carefully copied an exposition of thirty pages, based on a 'painful' text in Phillipians, presumably for her own instruction.¹⁶⁷ Richard Newdigate (1602-1678), the second son of Sir John Newdigate of Arbury, Warwickshire, was a judge who, when travelling on circuit, was accustomed to hearing and taking notes on two sermons a week. His favourite preacher was Richard Sibbes. When his duties brought him to the diocese he sought out Puritan preachers amongst whom were Josiah Packwood of north Warwickshire, Richard Vines and 'Mr. Armstone' heard at Nuneaton, Francis Bacon of Astley, and Robert Dowley and Simeon Ashe of Staffordshire.¹⁶⁸

Richard Newdigate's father, Sir John Newdigate (1571-1610), a Warwickshire J.P., was concerned to pursue his religion both in private and in public. A student of morality, English justice and husbandry, he also devoted considerable time to the contemplation of Christian topics, and set himself the task 'to lerne by way of Alphabet most thinges in the bible and others'.¹⁶⁹ He wrote

¹⁶⁶ DRO, 286 M/F 11, p.4a.

¹⁶⁷ DRO, D258/41/2. The exposition was based on Phillipians 2 v.27, 'For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow'. The Record Office dates the booklet at c.1620. It is later than this, i.e. c.1636-1644 (the date of Lady Gell's death). The back page has a copy of parts of Psalm 103, from George Sandys *A Paraphrase upon the Psalms of David*, which was published in 1636, and dedicated to Charles I. The notation of a tune is written underneath the psalm. Psalm-singing was popular amongst the godly.

¹⁶⁸ V.M.Larminie, 'The Lifestyle and Attitudes of the Seventeenth century Gentleman, with special reference to the Newdigates of Arbury Hall, Warwickshire', (Ph.D thesis, University of Birmingham, 1980), appendix XI.

¹⁶⁹ V.M.Larminie, 'The Godly Magistrate, The Private Philosophy and Public Life of Sir John Newdigate 1571-1610, *Dugdale Society Occasional Papers*, no.28 (Oxford, 1982), p.8. On the 28th. of May 1604, for instance, Sir John spent three hours contemplating the sinfulness of human nature: 'sure we oughte to be greavous against ourselves when we remember the greate weathe

them down alphabetically, commencing with 'A' for 'Abominable'.¹⁷⁰ Larminie found that Newdigate's notes contain quotations from about fifty authors or translators, including standard Calvinistic authors (such as Dent, John Foxe and William Perkins), and secular works both classical and contemporary.¹⁷¹ She argues that the 'books were read not so much for their intrinsic interest ... as for the advice they provided on these moral points, "for what is spoken to my sin"'.¹⁷² The godly read literature, whether religious or secular, under the authority of Scripture, for illustration or exhortation. It was never regarded as of equal inspiration to the Word, the 'plumbline' by which all uninspired literature was to be gauged. Such learning was only profitable if it encouraged the individual on the path of holiness. As Morgan has observed, Puritans insisted that 'all learning was laudable only as it conduced to, and aided, the living of a godly existence'.¹⁷³

Newdigate was a diligent magistrate, believing his responsibility to be God-ordained, and conscious of the need for divine assistance. 'As Solomon the wisest man that ever was...being a magistrate did pray to the Almighty for an understanding harte to judge his people...thus you see that it is not enough to be a magistrate but a man must doe like a magistrate and must resorte to the most highest and folow it directed'.¹⁷⁴ Ten 'rather pompous sermonettes' exist which Newdigate declaimed to the jurors at Quarter Sessions. Their message was that 'the subject must act in co-operation with the King and in the fear of God for the benefit of all'.¹⁷⁵ Two months after the Gunpowder Plot he exhorted jurors that at such a time, when their religion, King and country were in 'extreame hazarde no good cunterman ought then ether to witholde his tongue or hande according to his calling or faccultie from ayding to repel the iniurie'. He and they were to 'reedifie

(sic) we have and the little good we doe with, when we confece our time loste, with the evill example we have expressed'.

¹⁷⁰ Warwickshire County Record Office, CR 136 B664.

¹⁷¹ Larminie, 'Godly Magistrate', p.9 and Appendix.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹⁷³ J.Morgan, *Godly Learning, Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning and Education*, 1560-1640 (Cambridge, 1986), p.70.

¹⁷⁴ Warwickshire County Record Office, B718, Quarter Session Sermon, 27th. December, 1604.

¹⁷⁵ Larminie, 'Godly Magistrate', p.16.

and strengthen the breach with our wholest(?) endeavours against our adversaries that have sought the utter destruction of this body poloticke'.¹⁷⁶

The idea of the godly magistrate was by no means peculiar to Arbury. In his sermon at the Derby Assizes of 1623, Bourne had praised 'those honourable, worshipfull learned and religious justices' in the locality and Rudyerd had dedicated his *Thunderbolt* to a number of Staffordshire and Shropshire justices.¹⁷⁷ No doubt others also sought to exercise a judicial and godly calling within the diocese, of whom there is now no record. Occasionally, indirect evidence survives. The will of Exuperius Bradshaw of Duffield, another magistrate, contains a list of books, twenty in all, which reveal a similar concern with the law, painful religion and learning. Amongst the titles he left were *Terms of the Law*, *Dutie of Constables*, and *The Ground of the Lawe*, as well as a psalter by Wytheis, *David's Psalmes in Meeter*, and Beza's *Sermons on Christ's Passion*.¹⁷⁸

Puritanism Amongst the Middling and Lower Sorts.

What evidence of Puritan sympathies is there amongst the middling and lower sorts? Most comes from those presented for non-conformity, which, taken on its own, gives a distorting impression of the religious practices of the godly and, almost certainly underestimates the size of the Puritan community. It is likely that non-conformists were a small but very significant minority among Puritans. Evidence of godly conformity is harder to find. This section will consider first the church court records and then examples of 'painful' religion practised within the law.

The *comperta* include significant numbers of presentments for not kneeling at communion and for gadding to sermons. Around 1610 at Nether

¹⁷⁶ WCRO, B 722, Quarter Session Sermon. 'Platarche writing to traiane the good Emperor saith that ther ought to be such agreement between the prince and his people as is between the body and the members...'

¹⁷⁷ See above, pp. 106-108.

¹⁷⁸ LJRO, B/C/11, Exuperius Bradshaw, W.P.1636. On godly magistracy, see chapter four, 'Magistracy and Ministry' in Collinson *Religion of Protestants*, pp.141-188.

Whitacre, in the deanery of Arden, six parishioners were presented for receiving communion seated; in 1617 five men from the same parish were presented for the same offence.¹⁷⁹ In 1614, at Kenilworth, Thomas Greswold and Ellena Walkin were excommunicated for not kneeling at communion, while in 1620, at Bulkington, five men were presented for communicating either standing or sitting.¹⁸⁰ There were similar presentments in Staffordshire at Wetton in 1616, and at Rushall in 1623. Thomas Greaves of Rushall was presented both for 'goinge from his owne parishe Church upon a Saboth daie there beinge a co[mmun]ion that day, and receivinge the co[mmun]ion at Hutton sittinge or standinge and was reprov'd therefore by doctor Burges'.¹⁸¹ The parish officers were following the instructions of the Prayer Book to the letter. In 1625, Thomas Asplin refused to receive the elements kneeling, 'for which he was putt backe'.¹⁸² There was a far more serious problem at Coventry. In 1611, Bishop Neile had complained to King James that the mayor and aldermen refused to take communion on their knees, claiming that the custom had been sanctioned by previous bishops. James held this 'an insufferable disorder' and demanded their compliance. When he was asked to confirm Coventry's new charter in 1621, he delayed doing so until he had received notification of the city's orthodoxy from Bishop Morton.¹⁸³ James then demanded a more detailed certificate, and Morton asked Archdeacon Hinton to provide an account of the city's nonconformity. Hinton's assessment agreed with Morton's; he reported that, with regard to kneeling at communion, 'generally all do conform and it is rare at a communion ... to find one or two that offer to use any other gesture'.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ LJRO, B/V/1/22, p.13; B/V/1/34, p.35.

¹⁸⁰ B/V/1/29, p.10; B/V/1/40, f.9.

¹⁸¹ B/V/1/33, p.85; B/V/1/45, no pagination. Hutton possibly refers to Sutton Coldfield. If so, Greaves presumably thought that his non-conformity would be more acceptable to Burges who had, after a varied ecclesiastical career, some empathy with clerical scruples regarding subscription. If these were Greaves' hopes he was soon disabused of them!

¹⁸² B/V/1/47, p.12.

¹⁸³ W.Dugdale, *The History and Antiquities of Warwickshire* (London, 1730), vol 1, p.151; K.Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.223.

¹⁸⁴ CCRO, certificate from Morton, June 1621, A34/158.

In the period 1633-1639, there were a number of presentments (at least twenty-eight) for refusal to kneel at communion. Sometimes the description is ambiguous; it is difficult to tell whether parishioners had refused to partake because they were opposed to kneeling, or had communicated sitting. In 1633, at St. Chad's, Shrewsbury, however, the presentment is clear. Sixteen persons had refused to participate 'for the gesture's sake'. Amongst them were William and Alice Rowley and Judith Wright, patrons of Julines Herring.¹⁸⁵ The Rowleys with Owen George (of Shrewsbury) later appeared before the High Commission for non-conformity. They submitted in April 1635, Bishop Wright witnessing to their compliance.¹⁸⁶ Some parishioners travelled to other churches, where kneeling was not enforced, rather than compromise their consciences.¹⁸⁷ The previous year it appears that Judith Hart was presented twice in two different parishes for offences related to kneeling. At Foleshill church she refused to 'reverence the sacrament because she may not take it sitting'. At Sowe, Thomas Hart and his wife ('of Foleshill') were presented for interrupting 'Mr. Dale and Mr. Diamont', two ministers who were engaged in conversation about a disorder at the communion table. The Harts asked Dale 'contemptuously if he did take up women's cloathes at the co[mmun]ion table to see whether they did kneele or sitt'.¹⁸⁸

Paul Seaver has stated that the 'ecclesiastical hierarchy's effort to maintain the parish as the focus of lay religious activity was constantly compromised by the Puritan determination to attend sermons where they could be found'.¹⁸⁹ Sermon-gadding frequently led to presentments. The gadders were expressing dissatisfaction with their parochial ministry, either as individuals or in a body. Patrick Collinson has drawn attention to the concomitants of the practice: the company of like-minded believers, the ubiquitous psalm-singing on the journey and at the meeting, sermon repetition on the return journey home, and 'above all

¹⁸⁵ B/V/1/53, p.13.

¹⁸⁶ SP16/330/40.

¹⁸⁷ B/V/1/56, p.34.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.30.

¹⁸⁹ P.Seaver, *The Puritan Lectures* (Stanford, 1970), pp.42-3.

the thick fabric of sociability with other like-minded sermon-goers not necessarily kindred, not “natural” associates and often not neighbours, but what a puritan would call “friends in the Lord”.¹⁹⁰

In 1614, Anne Pinder of Shustock, Warwickshire, was presented for going to Whitacre for the service and the sermon, despite allegedly having ‘a sufficient minister at home’ in Joseph Harrison.¹⁹¹ In 1620 and 1626, parishioners of St. Julian’s, Shrewsbury, were also reported for attending other churches. In 1620 the court was informed that there were no monthly sermons at the church. Six years later the trickle of absentees had become a flood: ‘most of our parish go to other places in regards our service ys read when the time of service is in other parishes’.¹⁹² In 1616, at Dilhorne in Staffordshire, a solitary woman named Laton absented herself from her own parish ‘to heare strange preachers’, while in 1617 at Darlaston four men were presented for gadding to other churches.¹⁹³ At Walsall, in 1625, ten members of the congregation were charged with ‘wandring from there p[ar]ish church almost every Sondaie to other churches’. Among the number were Thomas Ball, rowelmaker, Alice Bristowe, basketmaker, and Thomas Saunders, who had, in addition, been presented for remaining seated to receive communion. In 1629, widow Buste and Margaret Dutton, a spinster, were brought before the church courts, accused of leaving both their parish church at Abbots Bromley and their ‘minister, being at prayer, to go to another’.¹⁹⁴ John Shaw, the Puritan preacher, recorded that when his wife was young ‘she was much unsatisfied with a reading minister in Brampton parish [Derbyshire], and

¹⁹⁰ P. Collinson, ‘Puritanism as Popular Religious Culture’ in Durston and Eales (eds.), *Culture of English Puritanism*, pp.32-57.

¹⁹¹ B/V/1/29, p.14. W. Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, ‘Shustock’.

¹⁹² B/V/1/39; B/V/1/48. The curate at St. Julian’s was failing to perform his duties. He neither preached himself nor provided a substitute, failed to read the homilies, did not read prayers on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturday evenings and read at two parishes. According to the presentment, ‘He eyther must be onely curat at St. Chadds or els at St. Julians’.

¹⁹³ B/V/1/34.

¹⁹⁴ B/V/1/47, p.18; /52, p.90.

therefore she went usually every Lord's day to Chesterfield to hear a faithful preacher'.¹⁹⁵

The 1630s saw church courts intensify their assault on gadding. In 1633, eighteen persons were presented by the churchwardens of St. Julian's, Shrewsbury, for not frequenting their parish church- the implication being that they went to worship elsewhere. Within the same Archdeaconry, it was reported that William Oliver, Jane Edge and Elizabeth Shelrocke 'do usually go to other parish churches'.¹⁹⁶ Some parishioners were presented for multiple offences. In 1635, Geoffrey(?) Phillips of Baddesley Clinton and Maria Stockton of Stoneleigh were charged with refusing to kneel at communion, and seeking a 'more profitable' ministry further afield.¹⁹⁷ In 1636, at Osmaston, near Ashbourne, one of the churchwardens, Godfrey Bead, was accused, amongst a catalogue of offences, of 'absenting himselfe from his own chappell to run after schismaticall fellowes'.¹⁹⁸ John Newbould of Brampton was presented for attending his parish church only when there were visiting preachers. Questioned about his activities by the churchwardens, he replied that he would go 'whether he list'.¹⁹⁹ The *comperta* also reveal a few presentments of those absent from their churches on Sunday afternoons. In some cases, at least, they had gone in search of more solid fare than was available at the catechetical exercises in their own parishes.²⁰⁰

A comparison of the presentments for gadding under Morton and Wright suggests that under the latter dissatisfaction with local parish worship was more widespread, or more actively prosecuted, or both. In the period 1633-1639 there were at least eighty-six presentments for gadding. The figure for 1620-1629 is

¹⁹⁵ J.Shaw, *Mistris Shawe's Tomb-stone*, p.435, quoted in P.Seaver *The Puritan Lectures* (Stanford, 1970), p.43.

¹⁹⁶ B/V/1/53, Ryton, p.27.

¹⁹⁷ B/V/1/56, pp.10,34.

¹⁹⁸ B/V/1/59.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.76.

²⁰⁰ See B/V/1/59, St, Alkmond's, Derby; B/V/1/61, Elford, Staffordshire; B/V/1/66, Hanbury, Staffordshire. The Elford presentment says as much. Over seven (the manuscript is indistinct) were charged 'for going to other p(ar)ish church to hear ser(vice?) and sermon on S in the afternoons'.

harder to quantify, because as well as nineteen reported instances, the 1626 returns for St. Julian's Shrewsbury recorded that most of the congregation avoided their own read service to attend other churches in the vicinity. If St. Julian's is taken as a special case, the 1630s were a period of more widespread gadding.

Voluntary public fasts were also popular among the godly. On these occasions they went without food (to remove a perceived judgment of God, or obtain special grace) and gathered to hear the exposition of scripture. In 1596, the Southam fast had been attended 'by many hundreds' from beyond the parish. Despite the Canon of 1604 which forbade unauthorised fasting, it remained popular amongst the Puritan fraternity, as the activities of Clarke, Ball, Ithiel Smart and Immanuel Bourne testify.²⁰¹ There is an indication that it was also practised among smaller groups. The manuscript, though not the printed edition, of Hildersham's *The Doctrine of Fasting and Prayer and Humiliation* (1633) included the statement that 'Christians of sundry familyes may lawfully (even in these tymes and in such a church as ours is) in a private house join together in fasting and prayer'.²⁰²

Court records also reveal a handful of presentments for other kinds of non-conformity. In 1614, at Chesterfield, Edward Needham, Reginald Breiland and Walter Atwood were presented for allowing the unlicensed James Colley to preach. At Darlaston, in 1617, Anne Alten a widow, was charged with Richard Frome for not kneeling during the general confession and the reading of the ten commandments and not bowing at the name of Jesus.²⁰³ In 1623, at Pleasley in Derbyshire, the parish clerk, Thomas Renshall, was accused of 'disobedience to the minister and non-conformitye in other things'.²⁰⁴ Only one layman was reported for not using the ring during a wedding service: this was in 1629 at Rushall, when John Birch refused to be married 'withe the Ringe'.

²⁰¹ See above.

²⁰² BL Add MS 4275 f.281, quoted in Webster, *Godly Clergy*, p.69.

²⁰³ B/V/1/29; /34. The implication arising from the Darlaston presentment is that Alten and Frome thought such ceremonies popish, not that they were irreligious.

²⁰⁴ B/V/1/44, p.13.

The Laudian emphasis on bodily reverence in worship is underscored, during the period 1633-1639 (the years covered by the surviving *comperta*), by over forty-eight presentments for failure to bow at the Name of Jesus, including some individuals also reported for other offences. In 1633, twenty-two were presented from St. Chad's, Shrewsbury, where the minister, Peter Studley, was a zealous anti-Puritan.²⁰⁵ At Alfreton, in 1636, nine people were reported for not bowing, and for remaining seated during the reading of the gospel. Among them were the vicar, Thomas Brooke and his wife (?) Elizabeth.²⁰⁶ Within the same six years, *comperta* record over twenty-six instances of those who failed to adopt the correct posture prescribed by the liturgy. In 1636, at St. Michael's, Coventry, Captain Burgoine was presented for not standing at the creed, while in 1639, at Mickleover (Derbyshire) Richard Jessop was required to appear before the church courts for remaining seated at both the Creed and the gospel.²⁰⁷ At Frodsley, in 1639, some unnamed women were reported 'that doe not stand upp at the readinge of the creed'; in the same year six parishioners from Newport were accused of 'nott standinge att the Creede and not boweing at the name of Jesus nor standinge at the Ghospel'.²⁰⁸ Some parishioners wore their hats during worship. John Todd entered the church 'Undecently with his hatt on in time of divine service', at Heage (Derbyshire) in 1639. Edward Chadwicke sat in the 'church in sermon time with his hatt on his head', while at Pattingham in 1636, William Merrington was presented for 'abusinge the church and churchwardens at the Comm[un]ion, by walkinge thorough the church with his hatt on his head after he had received the sacrament'.²⁰⁹

Gathering together in private homes to discuss the sermon and pray was not uncommon in the early decades of the century, although it was strongly discouraged and viewed as a form of conventicling under the Laudian ascendancy.

²⁰⁵ B/V/1/53, pp.9-10.

²⁰⁶ B/V/1/64. In the period 1609-1629 only three persons were presented for not bowing.

²⁰⁷ B/V/1/56, p.48; /64, no pagination.

²⁰⁸ B/V/1/56, p.22; /64, no pagination.

²⁰⁹ B/V/1/61, p.13.

In 1626, Peter Studley, the anti-Puritan minister of St. Chad's Shrewsbury, reported that 'Mr. George Wright and Mr. William Rowley do admitt the people of divers families into their houses to heare the sermons repeated to sing psalmes and prayer, most Sondag night in the year'. Studley was uncertain if this was a presentable offence, however, for he added the rider 'but whether [this] action or gathering so together may be termed a conventicle we referre to your honourable courte to iudge and determine'. In the stricter atmosphere of the 1630s he would have had no need to add this statement, as the case of William Pinson of Wolverhampton shows.²¹⁰ Rowley had been responsible for securing Julines Herring as lecturer at St. Alkmund's, and Herring had repeated his sermons at their homes. Neither Rowley nor Wright was impressed with Studley's ministry; in the same batch of presentments was a list of twenty-three names of those accused of not frequenting 'his' church which included 'Wm Rowley and his wife' and Judith Wright 'wife of George Wright gentleman'.²¹¹ Another conventicle was recorded in 1617 at Newborowe, Staffordshire, when seven men were charged with 'private meetinge touchinge religion and refusing to come to church or chappelle'.²¹² There were also a number of presentments for separatism. In 1633, nine persons appeared before the church courts from St. Chad's charged in accordance with the thirty-sixth section of Bishop Wright's

²¹⁰ See chapter 6.

²¹¹ B/V/1/48, pp.15,18.

²¹² B/V/1/34, p.8.

There is some similarity in the *comperta* presentments for non-conformity in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield with those of the diocese of Chester found by R.C.Richardson (*Puritanism in north West England*). In both dioceses there was a preponderance of charges for refusal to kneel at the sacrament (Richardson, p.76), as well as a number of presentments for gadding. Otherwise the northern diocese presents a picture of a more vibrant non-conformist Puritanism. There were more instances of conventicling, as well as a number of cases of objection to the use of the surplice and the sign of the cross at baptism. A number of men were presented for failure to remove their hats during services. Northerners were also more persistent in their non-conformity. Amongst midlanders there are few, recorded, repeat offenders, but the Chester records show that it was not uncommon for an offender to be brought before the court for the same offence on a number of different occasions. See for example the cases of Edward Bribbocke, of Manchester, presented in 1622, 1625 and 1633 for his failure to kneel (p.77), and of William Hamby and George Poulson of Brigmel, presented for gadding in 1619, 1621 and 1623 (pp84-85).

visitation articles.²¹³ Six years later, John Hole of Baschurch was reported for holding regular conventicles in his house, being joined by some 'strangers cominge thither upon the second day of Aprill last, and divers times before for the like', while at Newport, four parishioners were 'vehemently suspected for private meetings and conventicles'.²¹⁴

A comparison between the periods 1620-1629 and 1633-1639 shows that although the numbers charged with kneeling offences and conventicling remained relatively constant, there was a considerable increase in those who did not bow at the name of Jesus, or stand according to liturgical prescription at the requisite moments of worship. Gadding was also more widespread in the 1630s.²¹⁵ It is likely that these increases can be ascribed to the changed priorities of the period, with its greater emphasis on decency and uniformity, although a few cases seem to reveal a growing intransigence by parishioners. In the main, however, it is probable that those whose refusal to bow at the name of Jesus had earlier been ignored by churchwardens were now more likely to be presented. The ecclesiastical changes of the 1630s worked their way through the local diocesan hierarchy to the parish and succeeded in 'particularising' an increasing number of otherwise law-abiding people.

Puritan godliness which was personal, family-based and conformist was probably much more widespread, although, by its nature, absent from the records.²¹⁶ The painful religion which Elizabeth Gell of Hopton and Jane

²¹³ 'Whether is there any in your parish that doth separate himself from the Church of England, combine himself with any new brotherhood accounting those who are conformable to the state ecclesiastical in doctrine, government and ceremonies, unmeet to ioyn with him in Christian profession, contrary to the ninth canon. B/V/1/53, p.4.

²¹⁴ B/V/1/65

²¹⁵ See above, pp. 130-134.

²¹⁶ Note, for instance, the case of Mistress Ratcliffe of Chester from John Ley's *A Pattern of Piety* (1640), pp.145-9, cited in R.C.Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England* (pp.82-83). Immediately after her conversion she was influenced to follow the practice of those Protestants who refused to kneel at communion, feeling this to be a remnant of popish superstition. She later adopted a conformist position to the satisfaction of her conscience, after personal study and conferring with 'good Christians'. Richardson claims that this example demonstrates the flexibility and moderation 'that so often characterised Puritanism' and that it is impossible to use the numbers of those presented for non-conformity as an accurate indication of the strength of Puritanism.

Bagshaw of Litton sought to inculcate into their children and households must have been a pattern followed in many other homes within the diocese.²¹⁷ Those in positions of authority endeavoured to instil the doctrines of the reformed faith into their charges. John Rowlandson of Bakewell collected 'the Heads of his Expositions of the Church Catechism into a Catechism of his own composing'. He catechised not only in the parish church but also in the homes of the lower sort at Sheldon and Over Haddon.²¹⁸ Sometimes such teaching bore fruit. At the Staffordshire Epiphany Quarter Sessions of 1620, George Lee, yeoman, and Alice Cowcleiff were 'examined for popish words'. According to the testimony of James Getley, a husbandman from Cheadle, Cowcleiff had engaged him in conversation on the subject of Purgatory. Getley emphatically denied its existence, arguing that 'he had heard the preachers out of the pulpit say that as the tree falleth so it lieth: which he understood to teach that the soul that departeth well goeth immediately to Heaven and the wicked soul to Hell, till the Resurrection, when they shall receive their general judgment, or else all our preaching is in vain'.²¹⁹

Richard Baxter's father, with 'only the Competent Estate of a Freeholder', after 'it pleased God to instruct and change' him 'by the bare reading of Scripture' sought to lead his son to his God by admonishing him with 'serious speeches of God and the Life to come' and by setting him to read the Scriptures.²²⁰ Baxter's father's conformist Puritanism would have remained invisible had his son not written about him.

My Father never scrupled Common Prayer or Ceremonies, nor spake against Bishops, nor even so much as prayed but by a Book or Form, being not even acquainted then with any that did otherwise: But only for reading

²¹⁷ J.Brentall, *William Bagshawe* (London, 1970), p.4.

²¹⁸ Bagshawe, *De Spiritualibus Pecci*, pp.8-9; Brentall, *William Bagshawe*, p.4.

²¹⁹ D.A.Johnson, 'A Matter of Purgatory', *Staffordshire Catholic Historian*, 16 (1976), pp.1-3. Cowcleiff was unpersuaded. She allegedly replied that 'it was no more sin to cut all their throats that do not believe there is a Purgatory than to drink when one is dry'.

²²⁰ Sylvester (ed.), *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, pp.1,2.

the Scripture when the rest were Dancing on the Lord's Day, and for praying (by a Form out of the end of the Common Prayer Book) in his House, and by reproving Drunkards and Swearers, and for talking sometimes a few words of Scripture and the Life to come, he was reviled commonly by the Name of *Puritan*, *Precisian* and *Hypocrite*: and so were the Godly Conformable Ministers that lived any where in the Country near us, not only by our Neighbours, but by the common talk of the Vulgar Rabble of all about us'.²²¹

The importance of sound religious literature, particularly for those without easy access to reformed preaching, was acknowledged by the Puritans. When a poor pedlar called, with ballads and 'some good books', at the family home in Eaton Constantine, Baxter's father bought Sibbes's *Bruised Reed* from him. Such literature helped to strengthen the young Baxter's convictions and gave him a 'livelier apprehension of the mystery of redemption'.²²² Sibbes's book was expensive, running to about 400 pages, costing 8d or 9d, and not affordable to all; the pedlar would also have had cheaper religious literature for sale. The Staffordshire lady Frances Wolfreston's library contained a number of popular titles by John Andrewes addressed to the unconverted and converted. By the 1630s 'marketplace theologians like Andrewes were no longer writing ballads of social reform; instead they published little repentance tracts aimed at the conversion of individuals'. Such pamphlets were written for personal instruction, and to be read aloud.²²³ Booksellers sold a variety of Christian literature designed

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p.3. Concerned to show the errors of 'inconformity', Burges had argued that those who had perceived its error had sometimes been led to despise true Christianity, which he described as 'that strictness also of conversation, which all Christian men ought to follow'. This included diligence in hearing and reading the Word, the exercises of prayer and psalm-singing within the family, concern to keep the Lord's Day holy, especially in private, and modesty in clothing. These characteristics would have met with the approval of his non-comforming brethren. See Burges, *An Answer*.

²²² Sylvester, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, pp.3-4; T.Watt, 'Piety in the Pedlar's Pack: continuity and change 1578-1630', in M.Spufford (ed.), *The World of the Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge, 1995).

²²³ P.Morgan, 'Frances Wolfreston and "Her Bouks"', *The Library*, 6th. Series, xi (1989), pp.197-219; Watt, 'Piety in Pedlar's Pack', pp.265, 271,268.

to meet the needs of a broad cross-section of customers. The 1585 inventory of the Shrewsbury bookseller Roger Ward contained such Puritan staples as works by Calvin, Beza, Viret and Dent, as well as less 'specific' fare, such as psalters, communion books and assorted catechisms.²²⁴ The value Puritan ministers placed on literature as a means of edifying the laity is illustrated in wills. William Dethicke bequeathed a number of books to the town of Hartshorne 'with the direcon how they shall be used for the benefit of everie family that can reede'. Alexander How also left evidence of spiritual friendship with godly members of the laity, bequeathing to 'Mr. Ralph Porter my Gossippe Mr. Mason's Cure of Cares ... and to Mr. Thomas Porter of Chedull parish one booke called Jewell's exposition uppon the Epistle of Paule to the Thessalonians. William Smith of Draycot was to receive Henry Mason's Equivocation, 'if he shall be lyveing' and George Myners was to have a book of Preston's sermons. How gave 'to the wife of George Buxtons one Byble which was sometimes the booke of my ffather Mr. Bewutt, Parson of Cubley'.²²⁵

Conclusions

From a survey of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, throughout the period 1603-1640, the Puritans emerge as a continuous presence, a distinct group with characteristics which set them apart. Despite their differences in ecclesiology, the intensity of their beliefs and culture distinguished them from their contemporaries; they were recognisable to themselves and to others. Bradshaw's doctrine of the church might not have been to the liking of all his co-religionists, but his emphasis on the Scripture's sole authority in matters of doctrine and practice found a ready acceptance. Rowlandson of Bakewell and his non-conformist curate could work side-by-side because they were both primarily motivated by the reformed tradition, a point not lost on the Arminian hierarchy,

²²⁴ A.Rodger (ed.), 'Roger Ward's Shrewsbury Stock: An Inventory of 1585', *The Library*, 5th Series, xiii (1958), pp.252-266.

²²⁵ B/C/11, William Dethicke, W.P. 1626, Alexander How, W.P. 1649.

who suspended Broxholme and removed Rowlandson from his position as official of the peculiar, replacing him with a Laudian.²²⁶ Ball, the non-schismatic, was asked for advice by two prominent Puritans who left the Church of England (and the country), while the beneficed Philip Ward and Arthur Rickards participated with the suspended Arthur Hildersham in the same combination lecture. According to Fuller, although Hildersham was a non-conformist he 'loved all honest men'. The Puritan laity read the Bible (and Christian literature) with enthusiasm, seeking to regulate both their own lives and the lives of contemporaries by its precepts. Many of them gadded to hear 'their' preachers, participated in voluntary fasts, and met informally for mutual edification. They formed a distinct group in their local parishes.

Puritans were also recognisable to their less sympathetic contemporaries. Richard Baxter's father, 'changed through the bare reading of scripture', was branded a 'Puritan' by middling and lower sorts alike when he attempted to establish family prayer and evangelise drunkards; the same epithet was applied to 'local godly conformable' ministers, while, in 1615, Edmund Rudyard acknowledged that those that cavilled at cards and dice were called 'puritans and precisians'. There may have been an element of caricature in the name-calling, but it evidences an awareness of Puritan preoccupations and characteristics on the part of non-Puritans. Neither was this just a popular perception. Peter Studley, the anti-Puritan minister in Shrewsbury, attacked the godly fraternity in the town as individuals and a group, criticising such practices as extemporary prayer and personal bible-reading and meditation, as well as non-conformity.²²⁷

The Puritan ministry appears to have grown both in conviction and size during the period. Despite, or because of the changed ecclesiastical climate of the 1630s, ministerial resolve was generally strengthened. Some parishes, where the evangelical ministry was probably non-existent at the start of the period, provide

²²⁶ See chapter 7.

²²⁷ See chapter 7.

evidence of Puritan leadership at its close. Examples from Staffordshire include Ralphe Hulme of Betley (vicar, 1620-1653), Thomas Lightfoot of Uttoxeter (1617-1653), Francis Capps of Wolstanton (1618-1643), and Ithiel Smart of Wombourne- all ministries of many years. A number of ministers from Staffordshire and Warwickshire, who signed the Testimonies of 1648 declaring adherence to the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, and from Shropshire, who were members of the 1647 *classes*, had been in their cures since 1640, or before.²²⁸ A significant proportion were not known to the authorities for their non-conformity, and one can only presume that they had reluctantly complied to liturgical requirements, or were not reported, either because of sympathetic churchwardens, or because they steered a successful middle course of occasional conformity which their church officers tolerated.²²⁹ Amongst non-conformist ministers, of whom the vast majority were not schismatic, there was a resilience, sometimes coupled with an ability to 'lie low' in periods of persecution, and a constancy of purpose, grounded in a certainty as to their gifts and calling. For example, Fenn, twice removed from his Coventry charge, preached in the city for forty years after his deprivation, while Ball, suspended for proclaiming an unofficial fast in his parish church, continued the practice with Puritan adherents in Staffordshire and Oxfordshire. Sherratt of Arley ignored liturgical requirements for a number of years, notwithstanding the sanctions of the ecclesiastical courts, and Broxholme, despite his suspension at the Metropolitan Visitation, was cited to the consistory court for preaching at a conventicle in Derby, in 1637.²³⁰ Ministers strengthened each other by meeting together to share

²²⁸ See, for instance, for Staffordshire, John Taylor of Checkley, Ithiel Smart of Wombourne, Joseph Sound of Swynnerton, J. Jackson of Madeley and Robert Dowley of Elford, and for Salop, Samuel Hildersham of West Felton, Francis Wright of Wellington, Samuel Fisher of Withington and the 'ancient and learned' Garbett of Wroxeter.

²²⁹ See, for instance, in the Warwickshire Testimony of 1648: Obadiah Grew of Atherstone, Thomas Hodgkinson of Hillmorton, Richard Abel of Manceter, Samuel Wills of Coventry, who had been chaplain to Sir Walter Wrottesley of Wrottesley Hall, Staffs, and vicar of Croxhall in 1637, John Harper of Cubbington, James Sutton of Fenny Compton, who preached at the Warwick lectures, Henry Smitheman of Lillington and Nathaniel Potter of Radford.

²³⁰ LJRO, B/C/3/17.

spiritual problems, and, at times of persecution, were sometimes protected by influential layfolk and fellow clergy. Abetted by zealous patrons in parochial charges, by individual and corporate sponsorship of lectures, by the brief work of the Feoffees for Improvements, and by Bishop Morton's concern to promote the evangelical ministry, there is a real impression that the Puritan fraternity was growing steadily in strength, both numerically and spiritually, during these years. This growth was not uniform, however, and was subject to hierarchical harassment, both in the 1610s and, to a greater extent, from the Laudians in the 1630s. Nevertheless, the Puritan constituency increased. At Sedgley, according to Brook, Fenner's brief ministry was terminated 'most probably on account of his non-conformity', and 'being succeeded by a weak vicar, ignorance and prophaneness again returned'. By contrast, at Birmingham, where Puritan lectures were initiated in the 1620s, the pluralist rector, Luke Smith, generally left the preaching at St. Martin's in the hands of the Puritans, Josiah Sadler (1628-1634), and the latter's successor, Francis Roberts.²³¹ From the 1648 Testimonies, it appears that other Puritan ministries were flourishing during the 1630s. If the increase in lay presentments for non-conformity under Wright was occasioned, in part, by greater vigilance on behalf of the authorities, it probably also indicates both a hardening of attitude and an increase in the number of lay Puritans.

This modest growth had been achieved without the special favour of the ecclesiastical authorities, unlike the Elizabethan province of York, where Puritanism had been encouraged. Coincidentally, in 1584 the dioceses of Chester and Coventry and Lichfield both had schemes to improve the state of their respective clergy. The Chester Exercises had met with the enthusiastic endorsement of the Privy Council, who sent Bishop Chaderton a list of clergy with whom he was to confer which contained some prominent non-conformists.²³² By contrast, Bishop Overton's scheme to examine ministerial candidates, which also

²³¹ Brooks, *Lives of the Puritans*, vol.2, p.451; V.C.H., *Warwickshire*, vol. 7, pp.366,411.

²³² Richardson, *Puritanism in the North West*, pp.18-19.

made use of a few non-conformists, was vetoed by Whitgift. Despite the prevalence of Catholicism in Staffordshire and Shropshire, the diocese was not allowed the same latitude as the northern province. Even before the elevation of Laud in 1633, Bishops Neile and Overall had been unsympathetic to Puritan scruples and practices, and even their successor, the Calvinist Thomas Morton, had gently sought to reduce his clergy to conformity.

In comparison with Essex and areas of Chester, Coventry and Lichfield had no strong Puritan tradition. This general lack of a settled ministry over many years may, in part, explain the dearth of individual long-standing lay non-conformity in the diocese.²³³ It is in contrast to the principled stand of some members of the local clergy, who took a lead in such matters. Unlike Chester, where Richardson has argued that the influence of the clergy lessened as Puritanism consolidated itself, there is little evidence of a similar decline within Coventry, perhaps because Puritanism was less well established.²³⁴ Lay patronage was essential to bring about the success of Puritanism, but its role was subordinate to the preached word and its ambassadors. The influence of a few preachers extended far beyond the confines of the diocese. Bradshaw, Hildersham (based in Leicestershire, but very active in Coventry and Lichfield) and Ball were all figures of national significance in the Puritan movement.

Local puritans were strengthened in their faith by fellowship with like-minded believers. Such networks were not circumscribed by parish or diocesan boundaries. Clerics met at combination lectures, lectures, fasts, around the domestic hearth and at 'safe retreats' during times of persecution, for mutual edification and encouragement. Advice was sought and given, and doctrinal controversies hammered out. Equally beneficial were clergy/laity networks, where patronage or protection was sometimes given in return for spiritual ministry, such as preaching or counselling; a practice reminiscent of the patronage

²³³ See fn. 212, p.133.

²³⁴ Richardson, *Puritanism in North West England*, p.178.

extended by members of the Catholic gentry to their priests. Finally, the Puritan laity enjoyed fellowship one with another, in the corporate acts of worship and preaching, and in public fasting, as well as in other gatherings and activities, large and small, for mutual edification.

CHAPTER 4

Catholicism in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, 1603- 1640

Augustine Baker, the Welsh Benedictine, believed that by the early seventeenth century English Catholicism was going through a period of crisis. Its gold and silver ages were past, and it was currently debased by the iron corruption of the Protestant society within which it existed. Its survival had been made possible only by compromises which he regarded as almost worse than the death of the community. Baker believed that the Church must be transformed into an institution that was both completely Catholic and completely contemplative.¹

This chapter looks at the state of the Catholic community within the diocese, 1603-1640. The diocese had an unusually high percentage of Catholics overall. John Bossy has reckoned that Warwickshire contained eighteen recusant households in every thousand within the county, Staffordshire eleven and Shropshire ten. Only four counties had higher densities of Catholic households.²

Bossy has argued that by 1600 Catholicism was largely seigneurial, with gentry and aristocrats sheltering Catholic dependants in isolated 'pockets of Catholicism'.³ Christopher Haigh has criticised Catholic practice as essentially selfish, allowing the gentry to monopolise a priesthood whose ministry would have been more profitably employed meeting the needs of the wider Catholic community. Haigh maintains that by the 1630s the Catholic Church 'had become

¹ J.C.H.Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe* (London, 1976), p.74.

² J.Bossy, *English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, 1975). See map 1, the distribution of Catholics, 1641-2, pp.404-5. The four counties with higher proportions per 1000 were Monmouth (94), Lancashire (90), Durham (25) and Hereford (20).

³ *Ibid.*: J.Bossy, 'The Character of Elizabethan Catholicism', *Past and Present*, 21 (1962), pp.39-59.

a tiny introspective group, its missionaries unable to sustain and strengthen existing Catholic loyalties, some areas and some social groups being virtually lost to the faith'.⁴ This chapter seeks to test both the validity of Bossy's model, and Haigh's claim of a dramatic fall in adherence to the Faith. The chapter also explores the continuing phenomenon of 'church papism', or partial conformity, which Alexandra Walsham has studied in the Elizabethan period.⁵

Michael Mullett commences his recent study of Catholicism by looking at the Catholic recusant community and its emergence in particular regions, predominantly rural, and with Catholic aristocrats leading a largely 'plebeian rank and file'.⁶ This chapter, too, begins with some prominent examples of gentry Catholicism, and shows how this community was maintained and strengthened by inter-marriage. It will show, however, that Catholicism included all 'sorts' of people, and that more women were presented for recusancy than men. The chapter explores this community by the *comperta*, which give the names and misdemeanours of those presented to the Church courts in episcopal and archdiaconal visitations. Only a small proportion of the sizeable recusant community ever appeared in presentments for specific religious offences, and the explanation is probably to be found, in part, in the readiness of many Catholics to make tactical compromises with the established Church.

Catholicism within the Diocese: a Profile

Catholicism can be found in the diocese amongst all social classes. The gentry were prominent within it in all four archdeaconries. In Staffordshire, M.W.Greenslade argues that recusancy found its focal point in the Catholic squire who 'collected Catholic tenants and servants around himself', an assessment in

⁴ C.Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics and the People', in Haigh (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Basingstoke, 1984), pp.195-219.

⁵ A. Walsham, *Church Papists* (Woodbridge, 1993).

⁶ M.A.Mullett, *Catholics in Britain and Ireland, 1558-1829*, (Basingstoke, 1998), p.1.

line with that of Bossy. Examples of such families are the Biddulphs of Biddulph, the Comberfords of Comberford, Tamworth and Wednesbury, the Draycotts of Paynsley and Draycott-in-the Moors, the Giffards of Chillington, Brewood, the Heveninghams of Aston in Stone, the Levesons of Wolverhampton and the Macclesfields of Maer.⁷

Ann Hughes has noted that Warwickshire was among the counties with the highest proportion of Catholics.⁸ Six per cent of the resident gentry families had Catholic heads, a disproportionate number of whom were amongst the most wealthy in the county. Within the archdeaconry of Coventry, the Morgans of Weston-under Weatherley (and Northamptonshire) had an annual income of more than one thousand pounds, and the Middlemores, in the peculiar of Edgbaston, were only slightly less wealthy. Hughes sees Warwickshire Catholicism too as seigneurial, and most of the recusants among the minor gentry as clients or servants of an elite group. (While recusancy flourished among all ranks of Warwickshire society, she finds it strongest in the area from Henley-in-Arden to the Worcestershire border- that is, in the diocese of Worcester). There were very few places in the county with more than five recorded recusants listed that did not have a recusant gentleman resident.⁹

In Derbyshire a number of leading landowners remained adherents of the Old Faith. Sir Thomas Fitzherbert had been imprisoned for his Catholicism in 1561; his namesake, with his wife Dorothy, was presented for recusancy in 1614 by the church wardens of Somersall Herbert.¹⁰ The Catholic Eyre family of Hassop had gained greater prominence in the county during the sixteenth century. By the end of the century, Rowland Eyre (c.1540-1625), who was 'deeply

⁷ *VCH, Staffordshire*, vol.3, p.100.

⁸ A.Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.62-64.

⁹ *Ibid.* At Offchurch, the Catholic Knightleys had their seat; their co-religionists, the Hugfords, Greswolds and Warings lived in the north west of the county, where recusancy was strongest in the archdeaconry.

¹⁰ *VCH, Derbyshire*, vol.2, p.23; LJRO, *comperta*, B/V/1/29.

engaged' in the expansion of the Derbyshire lead industry, was said to have been worth £1,000 a year, and he and his son Thomas made regular land property purchases from the 1590s to the Civil War.¹¹ The Pole family of Radbourne and Eckington were also recusants. German Pole, of Radbourne, had gone abroad with a licence in 1586, and both his sons became Jesuits.¹² Several members of the family from Eckington were presented for recusancy in the early seventeenth century.¹³

In Shropshire, Edward Harnage (c1589-1659) of Belwardine in Cressage was presented in 1623 for not coming to church and was still being presented for recusancy in 1635.¹⁴ The Sandfords of the Isle of St. Chad's Shrewsbury, who were 'middling landowners in the county', were Catholics whose recusancy was intermittent;¹⁵ the Brooke family of Madeley, a prominent Shropshire recusant family, married into other recusant families both within and without the county.¹⁶

Bossy sees intermarriage as a characteristic feature of the Catholic community- partly from choice, and partly as something forced upon it by the caution or hostility of Protestant neighbours. There is evidence of Catholic gentry inter-marriage in all four archdeaconries, and that the sons of such unions often entered the priesthood. Robert Middlemore of Edgbaston (Warwickshire) married Priscilla Brooke of Madeley in Shropshire. Their son Richard, born in 1589, married Mary, daughter of Anthony Morgan of Weston.¹⁷ Similarly, Charles Waring of Berry Hall wed Lettice, daughter of John Hugford of Henwood, a fellow Catholic and near neighbour. Married in 1598, they had at least eight children before her death in 1610. Their eldest son, Thomas, married into the

¹¹ R.Meredith, 'A Derbyshire Family in the Seventeenth Century: The Eyres of Hassop and their forfeited Estates', *Recusant History*, 8 (1965-66), pp.12-77.

¹² G.Anstruther, *The Seminary Priests, vol.i, 1558-1603* (Ware, 1968), p.280.

¹³ See Privy Council list of Catholics in the county, drawn up in 1581, *Lansdowne Mss*, xxxiii, 60.

¹⁴ M.Wanklyn, 'Shropshire Recusants in 1635', *Midland Catholic*, pp.8-14.

¹⁵ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁶ Elizabeth Foster, who was presented at Shifnal for recusancy in 1614 was the mother-in-law of Joan, who was a member of the Madeley family. Other Brooke descendants were the Harringtons of Albrighton. See *ibid.*, and B/V/1/29, Salop,1614.

¹⁷ W.Camden, *The Visitation of the County of Warwick in the Year 1619* (London,1877), p.333.

Middlemore family. Two younger sons, Humphrey and William, entered Douai seminary in July 1622 to train for the priesthood.¹⁸ William was ordained in 1628 and sent to England in 1633.¹⁹

The practice was similar elsewhere. In Staffordshire, Bridget, the daughter of Francis Biddulph of Biddulph Hall, married Humphrey Harcourt of Ranton Hall, in the same county. Their son Valentine moved to the English College in Rome in 1629, at the age of eighteen, was ordained in 1633, and returned to England a year later to serve as a priest. Francis Harcourt and his wife Dorothy, also of Ranton Hall, were presented for recusancy (along with four of their servants and 'Will. Coton and wife, soujourners with them') in 1625.²⁰ Their son Francis, who was born in 1632, also became a priest.²¹ At Maer, in the north west of the county, Elizabeth, the daughter of Walter Macclesfield married William Dorrington of Sillinghurst, Woore, Shropshire. Their son Francis studied at St. Omers, in Flanders, before entering the English College at Rome, where he was ordained.²² He returned to England in 1640.²³ Both his parents and his maternal grandparents had been presented for recusancy.²⁴

¹⁸ According to the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, (Washington, D.C., 1967), the English college in Douai had been founded in 1568 for the education of priests. The College was also the *alma mater* of the English College in Rome (founded in 1577) and of the college in Valladolid (founded, 1598). The English Benedictines and Franciscans also established houses at Douai in 1604 and 1618 respectively. Douai was an important centre for the publishing of proscribed literature.

¹⁹ Humphrey was ordained in 1635, becoming president of Lisbon seminary in 1648. G.Anstruther, *The Seminary Priests, II, Early Stuarts* (Great Wakering, 1975), p.337-38. Camden lists four sons of the Warings, Thomas Charles, Edward and Humphrey. The name William does not appear. Perhaps Edward, who was born in 1604, was known as William.

²⁰ LJRO, B/V/1/47, Ranton, p.37.

²¹ Anstruther, *Seminary Priests II*, p.144. He was ordained in Rome in 1657, dying of the plague less than a month afterwards. It is quite likely that John Harcourt, alias Pesall (1633-1702), the Jesuit who preached before James II, was a member of this family. *DNB*.

²² The College of St. Omers, in Flanders, was founded by Robert Persons, the Jesuit, in 1593. In the early years the College was simply a residence for English boys who followed classes in the local Jesuit school. By 1617 there were 130 students. The first English rector, William Baldwin, S.J., (1621-1632) placed great emphasis on missionary endeavour. In the first half of the seventeenth century the College press, under John Wilson S.J., 'was the most important source of proscribed English Catholic Literature that nourished the piety and loyalty of English Catholics'. *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*.

²³ Anstruther, *Priests II*, pp.86-87.

²⁴ B/V/1/45, Muckleston; M.W.Greenslade, 'The 1607 Return of Staffordshire Catholics', *Staffordshire Catholic History*, 4 (winter 1963-64), pp.6-32.

In Derbyshire the pattern again was similar. Catholic gentry inter-married, and some of their sons continued their education abroad and were later ordained to the priesthood. Anthony Pole, the son of George Pole of Spinkhill, Eckington, was born in 1627. His father and his grandfather had both been presented for recusancy in 1623.²⁵ Anthony studied at St. Omers for five years, and afterwards entered the English College in Rome in 1646, later becoming a Jesuit. He was of the same family as the Jesuit priests, Gervase and German Pole. German was captured in Derbyshire in 1614, but was rescued by his brother.²⁶ At Stanley Grange, West Hallam, there was a Jesuit school run by Anne Vaux, who was related to Baron Vaux of Harrowden. Her great-nephew, Edward Thirmby, was educated there, before leaving for St. Omers in 1626, at the age of eleven. The school managed to remain hidden from the authorities until the 1630s.²⁷

In his study of the secular clergy of England and Wales in 1603-1659, Godfrey Anstruther lists a total of 76 who entered the priesthood from continental seminaries who came from the four Midland counties associated with the diocese. Most came from gentry homes and returned to serve England, although not necessarily in the home diocese.²⁸

In addition to sons of gentlemen entering holy orders abroad, we find some of their daughters entering convents on the continent. Helen, daughter of Alban Draycott of Paynsley, became a lay-sister at the Augustinian convent at Louvain in 1625, as did Bridget and Anne, the daughters of Walter Giffard of Chillington (in the parish of Brewood, Staffordshire) 'both of whom professed in 1621'.²⁹

²⁵ B/V/1/44

²⁶ Anstruther, *Priests II*, p.249.

²⁷ PRO, SP 16/294/74.

²⁸ The figure of 76 is aggregated from 14 from Derbyshire, 17 from Shropshire, 28 from Staffordshire and 17 from Warwickshire. About 40 (a conservative estimate) came from gentry families. Around 53 returned to England as priests. See Anstruther, *Seminary Priests II*. The figure does not include those priests who were listed in his first volume (1558-1603) who were still alive.

²⁹ Sister Mary Catherine, O.P., 'Seventeenth Century Nuns of Louvain, Antwerp and Lierre from Staffordshire families', *Staffordshire Catholic History*, 1 (1961), pp.17-19. Profession of faith proceeds after the novitiate, which is defined as the period of time during which a candidate studies and lives the rule of the religious institution which s/he wishes to join. During this time the

Their niece Mary also professed in 1625. 'She had entered young into the cloister and lived there until her profession'. Another member of this family, Margaret Giffard, joined the convent of the Carmelites at Antwerp in 1627. On the day of her profession she took the name of Sister Angela of the Holy Ghost.³⁰

The Catholic gentry played a prominent part in the maintenance of the Faith, not only by providing priests and nuns from amongst their sons and daughters, but also giving protection to clergy, tenants and clients. According to the Jesuit report of 1616, some priests spent their days hidden in the upper stories of their patrons' homes, 'like sparrows on a housetop', hidden from the observation of domestics and visitors alike, and only meeting the family for the mass.³¹ It was well known that other priests posed as family friends or retainers in the houses of the gentry. Thomas Draxe, unhappy in his short incumbency at Colwich (1613-1615) informed Walter Bagott J.P. that amongst local recusants was 'Anthonie Tunsteede, gentleman lurking and lodging with Mr. Thomas Wolsley, sometime at Wolsley hall, and sometimes at Hixon, a ranke seducing papist', whom Draxe suspected was '(perhaps) the (ghostly) father'.³² At Biddulph, in 1625, sixteen recusants were 'held for seducers[,] they have commonlie a priest amongst them who is unknown'. The list was headed by Richard Biddulph, gentleman, and his wife Ann, and included three of their servants. It is not unlikely that the priest lodged with the Biddulph family.³³

Catholic gentry, by harbouring priests, also provided the means of spiritual sustenance for their servants, tenants and other co-religionists. At Lapley, Staffordshire, in 1629, twelve recusants were recorded who were associated with

superiors of the institution judge the suitability of the candidate for membership. At the Council of Trent, a full year was made an essential requirement for the validity of future religious profession. *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³¹ H.Foley, S.J., *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus* (London, 1877), vol.1, p.217, from *Anglia Historia, 1590-1618*, Archives S.J., Rome.

³² Anon., 'Three Letters of Thomas Draxe', *CHS*, (1931), pp.265-272.

³³ B/V/1/47, p.27; J.Bossy, 'The English Catholic Community', in A.G.R. Smith(ed.), *The Reign of James VI & I* (London, 1973), pp.39-59.

the household of Sir Richard Brooke. As well as five family names, the list contains seven others, described as sojourners or servants in the house of Walter Brooke. Recusancy figures are often significantly higher in areas where the leading gentry were Catholics. The 1629 Lapley return contained 27 presentments, while at Albrighton in 1639, 37 were reported to the church courts, although the local landlord, a Catholic, appears to have escaped. At Solihull, three years earlier, the 60 presentments included members of the Hugford family and Charles Waring.³⁴ Gentry homes provided both shelter and anonymity for servants. The 1639 recusancy presentments for Longford, Shropshire, included Anne Hopkin and George Moreton and their servants; there were more at Longford Hall, but the local parish officers confessed that ‘we know not their names’.³⁵ Similar ignorance is displayed in the recusancy return for Bushbury (Staffordshire) in the 1635 *acta*. Lucretia Moseley and her family were listed, as well as their servant Elinor Philpott, who had never attended parochial worship since her arrival. The *acta* also reported that ‘the aforesaid Mistress Moseley keeps other servants in her home who do not come to Church whose names we know not’.³⁶ Furthermore, gentry protection sometimes gave individuals the courage to express their dislike of Protestant worship. In July 1613, Draxe, the vicar of Colwich, was much troubled by the recusant bagpiper Edward Yates, and complained that ‘the knave bagpiper Yate, was not this day at his parish church, nor (perhaps) will be in hast: hee thinketh that his Romish Landlord [probably Thomas Wolsley] will beare him out’.³⁷ On Sunday 22 November, 1625, John Radford appeared at Marchington chapel, Staffordshire, to show his contempt for the service. A servant in the employment of the recusant gentleman Edward Merrey, he came ‘unreverentlie into Marchington chappell in prayer time with a forrest like bill, with a dog in a long lynnenn bag at his side and then continued till

³⁴B/V/1/38, pp.22-3; /1/65; /1/58, pp.48-9; see also above, p.146.

³⁵ B/V/1/65, Longford.

³⁶ B/V/1/55, pp. 3-4.

³⁷ ‘Letters of Draxe’, pp.268, 271.

prayer was ended to the disturbance of others which was supposed for an ill intent for that it was his first cominge to the said church'.³⁸

Presentments for recusancy in the period 1607-1629 show that Catholicism was stronger in some parts of the diocese than others. They also show that Catholicism flourished among all 'sorts' of people. The 1607 Return of Recusants for Staffordshire, which included occupational descriptions for some of those listed, reveals the social diversity of the community. John Knighte, vicar of Ellastone, presented Thomas Alsoppe, a husbandman, and 'one Geffray Cashe, tombe-maker, lately come into our parish', whose profession indicates his employment by a very wealthy patron.³⁹ Those presented at Draycott included four husbandmen and four yeomen, while at Tamworth the curate also recorded a blacksmith, a maltster, a clothworker as well as Roger Tomlinson, 'a manservant'- also attesting to a gentleman employer. At Elford we find Henry Clement, a labourer, and Katherine his wife 'both of them now recusants'.⁴⁰ Social diversity can also be seen in the list of recusants convicted in the High Peak of Derbyshire at the Lent Assizes of 1613.⁴¹ Of 92 names, 3 were classified as gentlemen, 17 as labourers, 12 as husbandmen, 6 as yeomen and one as a tailor.⁴²

In this Derbyshire list, women were in the majority: 52 women to 42 men. This corresponded with the situation prevailing throughout the country, and

³⁸ B/V/1/47, Marchington, p.6.

³⁹ Greenslade, '1607 Return', pp.13-14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.24-25. This may either indicate that they had recently been 'converted' to Catholicism, or that they had moved from a stance of some outward conformity (i.e. they had been church papists) to adopting the separatist position which recusant literature and some of the priests advocated.

⁴¹ W.A.Carrington, 'List of Recusants in the High Peak of Derbyshire, 1616', *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 16, 1894, pp.140-143. The list is followed by 'Derbyshire Recusants indicted at the Lent Assizes Anno x Jacobi Regis', and 'Recusants Indicted at Sumer Assizes Anno xiii Jacobi Regis'. These have not been used as they do not contain a description of status.

⁴² One is unspecified. Of the women presented, 31 were described as wives, 16 as spinsters and 5 as widows.

figures from the diocese show that this pattern continued from Elizabeth's reign into the seventeenth century.⁴³ The 1607 recusancy returns for Staffordshire yield a similar pattern:

Table One

<i>Parish</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Rocester	8	6
Leigh	11	16
Draycott-in-the-Moors	6	11
St. Mary's, Stafford	7	10
Tamwoth	11	26
Tamworth <i>Half-recusants</i>	4	0
Totals:	47	69

The greater number of women presented for recusancy does not necessarily imply that women were more 'naturally religious' than men. The explanation is likely to be an economic one. The law stipulated that those found guilty of recusancy were liable to be fined at the rate of £20 a month. Under common law, however, a man was not liable for the debts of a '*femme coverte*'. This loophole enabled a wife to continue in recusancy, while her husband acted out the role of a conformist. As Alexandra Walsham has observed, 'a husband's concentration on protecting the family's resources and reputation could both enable and necessitate his wife's assumption of a more energetic role in safeguarding its spiritual integrity'. She highlights the paradox that in the eyes of the Catholic hierarchy a woman's inferior public and legal identity granted to her a superior devotional status and fuller membership of the Roman Church than that

⁴³ See Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists* (Woodbridge, 1993), p.79.

of her church papist husband.⁴⁴ Coventry and Lichfield provides many examples, particularly below the ranks of the gentry, of husbands who apparently conformed, but whose wives stayed away from parish worship. In 1610 a new Act required a husband, whose wife had been imprisoned for recusancy, to pay half the recusancy fine, or the equivalent in confiscated property, before she could be released. According to Bossy, J.P.s seem to have refused to collaborate in imprisoning women who offended. Any scruples that the Justices may have had were soon rendered obsolete when this fiscalised penal system was regularised into settlements with the Crown in lieu of recusancy fines. Compounding fines became more onerous after the commencement of the Personal Rule in 1629.⁴⁵

Recusancy Figures from the Comperta

To gain an impression of visible non-conformity during the period it is necessary to turn to churchwardens' presentments in response to visitation articles. Episcopal visitations were held every three years within the diocese, and were supplemented by the annual visitations of the archdeacons.⁴⁶ From the *comperta* it is possible to extrapolate the number of recusants within the diocese who were presented to the courts. As the *comperta* are sometimes incomplete, or contain the presentments of more than one visitation, it has been necessary to set some aside. Where feasible, *comperta* arising from the visitations of different bishops have been used.⁴⁷ From these sources it is possible to distinguish the areas within the diocese in which recusancy was relatively predominant, although the evidence needs to be treated with care. The parish with

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp78-81.

⁴⁵ Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, p.155; Mullett, *Catholics in Britain and Ireland*, p.26.

⁴⁶ For a list of the surviving *comperta*, see Table Two in Appendix.

⁴⁷ These are: for the archdeaconry of Salop, B/V/1/29 (1614), under Overall, B/V/1/43/45 (1623), under Morton and B/V/1/60 (1636) under Wright; for Derby, B/V/1/26, (1609), under Abbot (?), B/V/1/29(1614) under Overall, B/V/1/44, under Morton and B/V/1/59 (1636) under Wright; for Coventry, B/V/1/29, B/V/1/40(1620), under Morton, and B/V/1/58 (1636) under Wright; and for Stafford, B/V/1/34(1617) under Overall, B/V/1/47(1625), presumably under the Archdeacon of Stafford, B/V/1/52 (1629), under Morton, and B/V/1/61 (1636), under Wright.

the largest number of recusants in the see was the Derbyshire village of Hathersage, in the Peak District, with figures as high as 95 in 1614. However, such information is not always extant. Presentments from the deanery of the High Peak are missing from the 1623 returns. Even where manuscripts survive, churchwardens could be indolent in their duties, or either sympathetic to local Catholics or too frightened to present them. Despite such anomalies, the *comperta* allow at least an overall impression of the strength of the Old Faith within the diocese. The following section surveys the geographical pattern of recusancy within the diocese, and uses the evidence to test the accuracy of Bossy's model of Catholicism as a religion of the gentry protecting, under its aegis, friends, tenants and neighbours.

In the Archdeaconry of Coventry, the north west was the strongest recusant area. The parishes with the largest numbers were Solihull, and its near neighbour, Berkswell. In the 1614 *comperta*, the latter was recorded as having 25 recusants, although by 1620 this number had fallen by 5. In 1636 the churchwardens presented no recusants, but as 15 were reported in 1635 and 19 in 1639 the 1636 non-return was clearly a failure on the part of the churchwardens to perform their duty. By contrast, figures for Solihull during the same period, show a marked increase in presentments, from 9 in 1614, to 43 in 1620, and 60 in 1636. Other significant changes were at Bickenhill, where the churchwardens presented 12 for recusancy in 1614, no-one in 1620, and six in 1636, and at Meriden, to the north of Berkswell, where 9 recusants were presented in 1614, only one, six years later, and none in 1636. Elsewhere in the archdeaconry, there were scattered outposts of recusancy, with sometimes a solitary offender. At Bourton-on-Dunsmore, however, 5 recusants were reported in 1614, falling to 4 in 1620, with a single offender in 1636; at Offchurch the 6 offenders of 1614 had disappeared by 1620. Conversely, while only two had been presented at Hampton-in-Arden in 1614, by 1636 the figure had risen to 12.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ B/V/1/29; B/V/1/40; B/V/1/58.

In the cluster of presentments to the north west of the county, officers at Berkswell (25/20/ '0'), although not specifically including any gentry among the list of recusants, mentioned in 1620 that a Mr. Edward Chamberline 'does not come to church', and that Mr. 'Esaic Rawleige' had not communicated the previous Easter. At Meriden (9/1/0), Elizabeth Knightley, a gentlewoman, was presented for recusancy in 1614; in 1620 the solitary offender was another member of the gentry, Dorothea Andrewes. There is some correlation between parishes with a larger recusant presence and a gentry parishioner, either accused of recusancy or irregularities in attendance at worship. In the returns of 1614 and 1620, Solihull appears to be an exception to this rule, but the 1636 presentments include members of the Catholic Hugford and Waring families. Presumably the churchwardens of that year were less in awe of the local recusant gentry than their predecessors.⁴⁹

In the Archdeaconry of Derby, Hathersage contained the largest reported number of recusants. In the 1609 returns, four members of the local gentry were included.⁵⁰ Elsewhere in the county there were clusters of presentments in parishes in the north east, in the middle of the county, and in the south west. In the north east, with the exception of Hathersage, there appears to have been a marked increase in the number of recusants, which peaked in 1623, and declined, in a measure, by 1636.

⁴⁹ See p.146.

⁵⁰ Thomas Barley, gent., and his wife Matilda, and Dorothea Barley and Thomas Ellis, both described as 'gen'. The 1614 return does not include any local gentry, but see 'A List of Recusants in the Peak District of Derbyshire', by W.A.Carrington, in *The Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, vol.xvi, (1894), which contains the Barleys, among 82 recusants from the High Peak district, convicted at the 1613 Lent Assizes. See also J.C.Cox, 'The Recusants of Derbyshire', *Journal of Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, vol. x (1888), pp.56-70. The Barleys were recusants of long standing.

Table Three

<i>Parish</i>	<i>1609</i>	<i>1614</i>	<i>1623</i>	<i>1636</i>
Ashover	1	0	12	7
Dovebridge	0	5	13	11
Killamarsh	1	1	15	4
North Wingfield	4	5	9	8
Sutton c. Duckmanton	4	5	9	8

There are, however, other parishes which seem to contradict this trend:

Chesterfield	12	9	n/a	18
Duffield	10	6	n/a	3
Eckington	3	0	12	45
Etwall	8	9	n/a	9
Hayfield	3	12	n/a	7
Norbury	18	0	n/a	29

The picture that emerges is somewhat perplexing. Some of the larger 'recusant' parishes such as Etwall (9 in 1614), Chesterfield (12 in 1609) and Killamarsh (15 in 1623) seem to have flourished without local gentry 'protection'. In other parishes, such as Eckington, which in 1623 had 12 recusants, amongst whom were 'George Poole, Esq., and George Poole, gen.', a more traditional picture emerges. The marked increase in the Eckington returns of 1636 is probably indicative of a lax attitude on the part of previous church officers, rather than an upsurge in Catholic adherence. The parish was well supplied with recusant knights- the 1636 figure included Sir George Poole, Sir Godfrey Tretton and Sir Richard Swinburne with their respective families. In Derbyshire, there is again evidence that

‘popular’ recusancy, could flourish among the middle and lower sorts without the benefit of gentry protection, as well as examples of ‘traditional’ seigneurial Catholicism.

The deanery of Salop contained significant numbers of recusants in the parishes of Ellesmere and Wem. Elsewhere, presentments were few. In the deanery of Newport, Albrighton had the highest number of non-conformists. 29 were presented in 1636, and the figure rose to 37 in 1639. Clustered around Albrighton, in the east of the deanery, were a little group of parishes with a smaller recusant presence.⁵¹ The local Catholics were obviously strengthened in their adherence to the Faith by resorting to the home of John Harrinton, at Boningale, where, in 1626, the churchwardens had strongly suspected that Father Lee was a frequent visitor.⁵² At Ellesmere the presence of gentry-led recusancy is harder to detect, both from the *comperta* and from the *acta* list of 1635.⁵³

⁵¹ Shifnal, Tong and Boningale.

⁵² B/V/1/48.

⁵³ B/V/1/55.

In the archdeaconry of Stafford the main areas of recusancy were in the south west, centre and north of the county.⁵⁴ Major recusant parishes were as follows:

Table Four

<i>Parish</i>	<i>1617</i>	<i>1625</i>	<i>1629</i>	<i>1636</i>
Bushbury	5	13	13	0
Patshull	1	10	9	20
Handsworth	12	23	36	43
Tamworth	36	0	20	48
Lapley	13	25	24	27
Ranton	4	16	14	9
Seighford	10	8	10	9
Stafford	18	16	13	15
Sedgley	25	22	17 (+19?)	23
Leigh	19	25	27	19
Draycot/Moors	28	0	36	28
Checkley	1	7	10	12
Rocester	17	15	8	0
Cheadle	5	12	6	6
Ipstones	3	6	11	7
Cheddleton	5	14	9	10
Muckleston	21	28	15	2 (+22?)
Biddulph	0	16	22	17

Staffordshire had the largest number presentments of recusants in the four archdeaconries. In the main, the figures show a marked increase in 1625, presumably as a result of Morton's more overtly anti-Catholic stance.

⁵⁴ In the area of southern central Staffordshire there was a belt of peculiar parishes.

Presentments of gentry were also higher in Staffordshire; and even in such parishes as Tamworth and Draycott-in-the-Moors, where, until 1641, a significant number of recusants were presented without the inclusion of a member of the local gentry, this does not necessarily signify that there were no local Catholic landowners. There were gentry recusant families with land in both parishes. A relatively high number of reported recusants with no gentry figures amongst the presentments might simply indicate that the landowner was too powerful to be presented.⁵⁵

The recusancy returns for some parishes are obviously unreliable. The figures for Tamworth do not present a consistent pattern in the period 1617-1636. The return of 48 in 1636 is more in line with the 1617 figure; the 1620 non-return may be ascribed to a dereliction of duty on the part of the churchwardens. Other returns are problematic. At Leek, Staffordshire, in 1625 and 1629 a substantial number of parishioners were reported as excommunicates. On the basis of other similar returns, it might seem reasonable to deduce that they were recusants. This, however, was probably not the case. The 1635 *acta* fail to record any recusants and the 1636 *comperta* return one name only. This should make us wary of blanket ascriptions⁵⁶.

In all the archdeaconries we can also find less numerous offences, presentments for not communicating at Easter, not communicating at all (i.e. 'half-recusancy'), and not frequenting the parish church. A parishioner could be presented for the latter while not being charged with recusancy, which presumably implies that the accused attended church at least on some occasions.⁵⁷

Are the *comperta* a reliable guide to the strength of recusancy within the diocese? It is probable that they underestimate the numbers involved. The

⁵⁵ See p.145. In 1641 'William Comberford de Comberford esquire' was presented. See A.Kettle (ed.), 'A List of Staffordshire Recusants, 1641', *Staffordshire Catholic History*, 5 (1964), pp.1-37, from SRO, D.593/public offices/6.

⁵⁶ B/V/1/55; B/V/1/61; Kettle, 'List of Staffs. recusants', p.14. In 1641, the Quarter Sessions returns lists four, including 'Alice, wife of John Erdley, gentleman'.

⁵⁷ See below, pp. 180-181.

Shropshire *acta* of 1635 contain over 190 presentments, at least 40 of which are not specifically presented for recusancy.⁵⁸ Despite this, the *acta* list is at least double the recusant presentments contained in the 1636 *comperta*.⁵⁹ 1,069 persons were indicted at the 1641 Staffordshire Epiphany Quarter Sessions, almost doubling the 1635 *acta* returns of 568, although the earlier report did not include peculiars.⁶⁰ The 1641 indictments generally list greater numbers of recusants from the parishes in the archdeaconry: for example, 36 recusants were reported for St. Mary's, Stafford, an increase of 17 on the earlier figure. It may be that fears of a Catholic insurrection were, in part, responsible for the increase, with local officials no longer willing to turn a blind eye to known and suspected recusants in their midst.

The 1641 figures for Staffordshire have been extrapolated by B.G.Blackwood.⁶¹ He has been able to classify them according to status and occupation (see Table Five).⁶² By their number and classification they show that Haigh's theory- that by the 1630s the Catholic church had become a tiny introspective group and that some social groups had been lost to the Church- is inapplicable to Staffordshire, at least. Furthermore, the 1641 figure is almost certainly an underestimate of the size of the recusant community. In a number of parishes the recusant returns were less than in 1635; at Biddulph 13 names from the earlier list had disappeared from the 1641 indictments, to be replaced by 22 new names. Not all of those listed in the earlier return can have died: some may

⁵⁸ B/V/1/55; M.Wanklyn, 'Shropshire Recusants in 1635', *Midland Catholic History* In this instance 'recusants' are taken to be those specifically charged as being such, and excommunicates. Where this is not stated and the charge is not made, even though in practice the person seems to qualify richly, he has not been designated as a recusant. See, for instance, the case of Edward Harnage, esquire, of Leighton, 'for not frequenting his own parish church, not receiving the sacrament'. Possibly this is a case of churchwardens compromising their consciences by half-reporting the local landlord, itemising his failures and yet being reluctant and wary of charging him with full-blown recusancy.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; B/V/1/55.

⁶⁰ B/V/1/55; Kettle, 'Staffs. Recusants'.

⁶¹ B.G.Blackwood, 'Plebeian Catholics in the 1640s and 1650s', *Recusant History*, 18 (1986-1987), pp.42-53.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Blackwood's table includes women, whom he has 'ranked' according to the occupation/status taken by fathers, husbands, ex-husbands and brothers.

have turned reluctantly to church papism and occasional conformity to escape censure and the penalties involved. Others may have been overlooked in the indictments.⁶³ Table Five also shows that throughout the county only 53 (5%) were servants or labourers. As the gentry numbered 206, this seems to be a serious underestimate. Presumably, parish ignorance of those in the employ of local magnates was widespread, and many recusant servants went unreported as a consequence. Both the 1635 and 1641 figures continue to attest to the greater preponderance of women to men in the returns. 341 out of the 568 presentments (60.04%) in the *acta* were female; in the later indictments the yield was 617 out of 1069 (57.7%). Some of these were married women, and it is likely that a number of their husbands were church papists for financial reasons only.

Table Five

<i>Status or Occupation</i>	<i>Number of Persons</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gentry	206	19
Professionals	-	-
Tradesmen/Craftsmen	105	10
Yeomen	250	4
Husbandmen	209	19
Labourers and Servants	53	5
Others	199	19
Unknown	47	4
Total	1069	100

In conclusion, it can be seen that the prevalence of recusancy within the diocese was not uniform; in some areas it was more concentrated than in others. The archdeaconry of Stafford had both the largest number of gentry presentments

⁶³ See B/V/1/55 and Kettle, 'List of Staffs Recusants'. Instances where 1635 figure was greater include Mayfield 10/2; Horton 13/9; Tamworth 48/22.

and the largest number of presentments *per se*. As a whole, Coventry and Lichfield contained a recusant population which was sizeable, apparently larger than the returns attest, and socially heterogeneous. Figures from all the archdeaconries clearly indicate that this community proved resilient, and in some areas could be said to be flourishing and self-confident. However, individual Catholics, cut off from seigneurial protection, the ministry of priests and the encouragement of fellow-believers, fared less well. A number of parishes which had reported a few defaulters in the 1610s and 1620s (such as Scarcliffe and Matlock, Monks Kirby and Churchover) were apparently 'recusant free' by the 1630s. Attrition by death or the Church of England had taken its toll.

Rites of Passage

John Bossy has written that seminary priests taught that 'baptism, marriage and burial were, as much as church attendance, matters in which there could be no communicating with heretics'.⁶⁴ He remarks that 'one cannot easily envisage a distinct Catholic community continuing in existence which did not control its own means of survival', and that (until the Marriage Act of 1753) there was little evidence of Catholic members of the gentry or others in the community objecting to this doctrine of separation: 'what seems to have weighed heavier than all was an overriding sense of the importance of the family, and that the public authority had no claim to obedience in respect of acts and occasions where it was most intimately concerned'.⁶⁵ The importance of the survival of the Faith within the Catholic family outweighed the pressures to participate in the Protestant rite of baptism, even though the ecclesiastical penalties for clandestine baptism were augmented by a heavy fine of £100, by an Act of 1606. It might be anticipated, however, that such fines made Catholic non-conformity a luxury in which only the wealthiest families could afford to indulge. The Warwick Sessions Indictment

⁶⁴ Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, p.133.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133-4.

Book for the years 1631-1643, appears to bear this out, with only one entry for illegal baptism, at Rowington in 1632, and no indication of any fine imposed.⁶⁶ This leads one to query the extent of popular support for the priests' directives on this issue of total separation from the established Church. There are two possible explanations for the dearth of cases. Either most recusants ignored the voice of conscience and had their children baptised in the parish church and thus avoided the penalties imposed for disobedience, or they procured priests to perform the ceremony according to the Roman rite and the local church officers purposely overlooked their transgression.

David Cressy has written that 'baptism was intended as a public performance, introducing a new Christian to the community at large. The child was supposed to be brought to the church, and the ceremony was designed to be conducted in the face of the entire congregation'.⁶⁷ Catholics who refused to conform were thus offending against both the state church and the community. Despite the strictures of the seminary priests, pressures to conform were therefore considerable. Is there evidence, from the *comperta*, of Catholic non-compliance with the Protestant rite of baptism? It is remarkable that, during this period, very few of those presented to the church courts were charged with failing to have their children baptised by the local minister, and this suggests that over this issue the majority of Catholics were reluctant conformists. Three cases can be found in the Coventry *comperta* of 1609-1610. In two of these, the parents were charged with having their children baptised outside the parish, while Edward Aston of Berkswell refused to have his children baptised in his local church.⁶⁸ In 1609, Berkswell was home to a little Catholic enclave, protected by the local gentry.

⁶⁶ S.C.Ratcliff and H.C.Johnson (eds.), *Warwick Sessions Indictment Book, 1631-1674* (Warwick, 1941), p. 6. There are no surviving records of previous indictments. Neither are clandestine baptisms recorded in the two Sessions Order Books covering the period 1625-1650. See Ratcliffe and Johnson (eds.), *Warwick County Records vol.1, Sessions Order Book 1625-1637* (Warwick, 1935); *ibid.*, vol.2, *1637-1650* (1936).

⁶⁷ D.Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death* (Oxford, 1997), p.188.

⁶⁸ B/V/1/22, Coventry, Berkswell.

Amongst the eighteen accused of recusancy in the parish were the gentleman, Thomas Higginson and his wife Elizabeth and daughter Anna, and Francis Appleton and Anne Matthew, who were also described as belonging to the parochial elite. Frances Appletree, of Berkswell, 'refuseth to gyve thanks after childbirth', and Joanna Stone, of the same village, was presented as 'a midwyfe unlicensed, will bring no children to church'.⁶⁹ Cressy has pointed out that midwives were pillars of the local community. Licensed by the church, 'none could match the midwife's ritual significance in bridging the domestic world of childbirth, and the public realm of organised religion'.⁷⁰ At Berkswell, Stone subverted her position in that she was neither licensed, nor brought the fruits of her midwifery to be baptised, and thus fell foul of the church authorities.

In 1609 Richard Ince of Eckington, Derbyshire, a recusant who was 'a teacher of children in his home,' had a 'childe borne and christened in his home and in the night'.⁷¹ At Ashbourne, in 1636, Constance and Thomas Dalton were both presented for recusancy and Constance was also charged with being 'delivered of a manchilde and would not bring it to the church to be baptized, but caused one Ellene Gaunt a midwife of Yearley...to baptise it and call it Phillipp'. She and Gaunt were excommunicated.⁷² Two other instances of extra-parochial baptism are found in the Stafford *comperta* of 1614 and 1629. At Bradeley in 1614, Edward Dickinson, a farmer, was accused of bringing 'strange ministers to baptise two of his children in his private house'. He was also reported for being absent from the Communion for a number of years.⁷³ At Kinver in 1629, the gentleman Thomas Tracie was presented for having a 'a child christened at home and not by the minister of the place, and also refusing to come to Common

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Berkswell p.15.

⁷⁰ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, Death*, pp.60-2.

⁷¹ B/V/1/26, Eckington, p.40.

⁷² B/V/1/59, Ashbourne, p.52.

⁷³ B/V/1/30, Bradley, p.32.

Prayer'. Interestingly, Tracie was not presented as a recusant. His wife Frances was charged with 'not coming to give thanks after childbirth'.⁷⁴

Sometimes parents were presented for not bringing infants to be baptised, though not accused of having them baptised elsewhere. In the parish of Ellesmere in 1633, 8 parishioners from Penley and 8 from Dadlaston were presented for this offence, while at Langford in 1636 Thomas and Joy Badgge were presented with three others for not coming to church to christen or bury,⁷⁵ presentments which suggest that the family were Catholics.⁷⁶ In others, the religion of at least one of the parents is less open to doubt. In 1623 Walter Brindley of Lapley in Staffordshire was presented for having 'a child not christened by our vicar'; his wife Anne was presented at the same time, amongst twenty others, who were described as 'not attending church'.⁷⁷ In 1629 Thomas Bromefield of Bradeley, also in Staffordshire, was charged 'for having his daughter brought to bed in his house and not bringing the child to be baptised in the parish church. His wife, Frances, was one of the four recusants reported to the church courts'.⁷⁸

In the cases from Berkswell and Kinver we also find a refusal to participate in the rite of 'Thanksgiving of Women after Child-birth'. This was a religious ceremony to offer thanks for the safe delivery of a mother, and marked her return to the life of the community.⁷⁹ It replaced the older Catholic rite of the Order for the Purification of Women, 'transforming the woman at the centre of the service from a penitent to a celebrant, from a petitioner at the margin of society to the focus of community attention'.⁸⁰ Participation in the new rite would have seriously compromised the pious adherents of the Old Faith. There are several instances of non-compliance with the Protestant rite, and although this was also

⁷⁴ B/V/1/52, Kinver, p.79.

⁷⁵ B/V/1/53, p.16; B/V/1/59, p.52.

⁷⁶ See particularly B/V/1/34, Tamworth, pp.13/4. George Crewe who 'refuseth to have his child baptised' was not listed among the large recusant presence in the parish (36 were presented).

⁷⁷ B/V/1/45, 1623.

⁷⁸ B/V/1/52, p.25.

⁷⁹ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, Death*, p. 200.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.206.

associated with the Puritans in the 1630s, it is reasonable to assume that most offenders were Catholic. The records sometimes make this clear. In 1609, the churchwardens at Kedelston in Derbyshire presented Elizabeth Knott for non-appearance at a Thanksgiving service and for refusing the oath of allegiance, and commented that she had been ‘churched as it is thought by a seminary’.⁸¹ In 1614, Roger and Emeta Dansen ‘have not their children baptised nor she churched’, while at Dronfield in Derbyshire, in 1620, Henry Barnet and his wife were presented for recusancy, for ‘the said Henry Barnet hath not brought his child to be christened, neither hath his wife come to church to give thanks’.⁸² In 1626, the churchwardens of St. Chad’s, Shrewsbury, presented seven women for refusing to be churched after childbirth, most of them probably for Catholic scruples.⁸³ In 1635, at Warmington, Warwickshire, Temperance Fullhurst was presented for ‘not coming to church to give god thanks for her safe deliverance’. At Milverton, in the same *comperta*, the church papist Joanna Petoe was not churched after giving birth, and appears to have used her deliverance as an excuse to stay away from worship for ten weeks.⁸⁴

The very small number of christening-related presentments in the records represents only a tiny fraction of the Catholics within the diocese. Perhaps the heavy penalties imposed on recusant baptisms drove most Catholics to have their children baptised by their local Protestant minister. Even the children of very pious Catholic families are, at times, to be found in these records.⁸⁵ It may be that

⁸¹ B/V/1/26, ‘Killmastone’, pp.41-2. It is to be presumed that the Oath of Allegiance which they refused to take was that stipulated by a statute of 1606 which required that Catholics, who were not members of the nobility, swear of their abhorrence and detestation as impious and heretical the ‘“damnable doctrine” that Princes which be excommunicated or deprived by the Pope may be deposed or murdered by their subjects’. Bossy, ‘English Catholic Community’, in Smith (ed.), *Reign of James VI*, p.92.

⁸² B/V/1/41, Dronfield, p.41.

⁸³ B/V/1/48, ‘St.Cedd’, p.19. the minister of St. Chad’s was the notorious anti-Puritan, Peter Studley. Possibly some of those who absented themselves from worship took a more reformed stance.

⁸⁴ B/V/1/56, pp.89, 83.

⁸⁵ For example, the baptisms of Humphrey, son of Charles Waring of Berry Hall, Warwickshire, and Francis, the son of William Dorrington of Muckleston, Staffordshire, are recorded in their respective registers. Both subsequently became priests. See above, pp.146-147.

others had their offspring baptised privately, and also either submitted to Church baptism or bribed the local incumbent to enter the child's name in the parish register. If these practices did take place, the *comperta* bear no witness to them.

Burials

With regard to funerals, the established Church had ruled that a recusant was not entitled to parish burial. Cressy maintains, however, that recusants and offenders who died while excommunicated were generally afforded a churchyard burial, even if they were denied a formal religious service. Catholics (and non-conformists) usually secured burial in the churchyard, regarding the place as belonging to God and His people in general, rather than to the adherents of the established church alone, indicative of both the respect in which 'sacred space' was held by Catholics, and their reverence for the remains of the departed. Burial outside this area sometimes led to the corpse being dug up accidentally, or desecrated by animals (usually hogs). In 1625, Edmund Godfrey of Barton-under-Needwood expressed his dissatisfaction that his recusant mother had not been buried in consecrated ground by enlarging the churchyard to include the adjacent area of Pinfold Lane, where his mother had been interred.⁸⁶

Cressy has remarked that 'though most places saw neighbourliness triumph over sectarianism'.⁸⁷ This was not always the case, however. In 1625, the Lichfield consistory court charged several men for assisting in the burial of Katherine Edwards at Handsworth. A 'wilful, obstinate popish recusant', she had died excommunicate 'by reason whereof she did incurr the penaltie of the lawe in that behalfe ... and was cutt off from the congregacon and number of the faithfull neither was ... her bodie to be interred ... in Christian sepulture but to be cast forth as an enemy of God's church and true Religion'.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ B/V/1/47, p.16.

⁸⁷ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, Death*, p.465.

⁸⁸ B/C/5, 1626, Handsworth,

Bossy notes that Catholics were reluctant to let the minister read the Protestant burial service over the dead.⁸⁹ It was common for them to bury their dead at night, he argues, 'in circumstances which according to the views of the parson and the habits of the region would approximate more nearly to discreet agreement or forcible entry'. He adds that the most distinctive visual feature of a Catholic funeral, the carrying of candles and tapers, 'must have proved both useful and picturesque'. Accounts of nocturnal burials are widespread throughout the diocese, the Derbyshire village of Hathersage being the scene of thirteen in 1629-1631, and are found in a variety of different sources.⁹⁰ Simon Ryder, a Catholic yeoman from West Bromwich, recorded in his commonplace book the deaths of a number of prominent local figures, and noted that a local gentleman, Richard Parkes, was buried in 1618 on the day after his death 'at Wednesbury the ninthe day of maie att night'. Sir Walter Leveson died at his home at Ashmores, Wolverhampton, in January 1620, 'and was buried near Wolverhampton on the same day'.⁹¹ The swiftness of these burials, even by contemporary standards (no more than two or three days usually elapsed before the dead were interred), was probably due to the families' wish that private burial might take place without the need of extra vigilance on their part from interference by the local minister and parish officials.⁹² Parish registers also record the unlawful interment of recusants. Amongst the burials recorded in Rocester for 1612 is 'Joane, w of Thomas Greene, Hbman (an excommunicate parishioner) died about the xxvii daie of September bur'.⁹³ Unlike the other entries in the register, Green's date of interment is left blank and the day of her death (not given in other records) is approximated. Presumably the minister was not present at her burial, and unsure when it took place; Green was probably buried in the churchyard surreptitiously at

⁸⁹ Bossy, *The English Catholic Community*, p.140.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.141. In the 1609 comperta, Hathersage churchwardens presented 82 parishioners as recusants; in 1614 the figure had risen to 95. See p.154.

⁹¹ W.S.L., *HYPOMNEMA*, SMS 336, ff.73,74.

⁹² Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p.426.

⁹³ 'Hbman' is a contraction of husbandman.

night, without the knowledge or agreement of the incumbent.⁹⁴ The register for the parish of Seighford includes Isabel Chamberlain, a Catholic, who was also buried secretly at night in March 1615. Bossy contends that in the 1630s the resistance of ecclesiastical courts to the burial of Catholics in consecrated ground was beginning to crumble, and that it had largely collapsed when the Civil War broke out.⁹⁵ The rather limited number of presentments contained in the comperta during this period perhaps bear this out.

The practice itself appears to have been widespread. There is more than a hint from the records that the recusant community was skilled and proficient in organising and undertaking the funerals of its members. Katherine Edwards moved to Handsworth four years before her death, being described as ‘aged, weake and feeble’ and effectively housebound, yet when she died she was buried in the church surrounded by a significant company of mourners.⁹⁶ At Marchington in 1636, the excommunicant Nicholas Deakin was buried in the parish church at night by three fellow-parishioners, two of whom were recusants. At Leebottwood in Shropshire, in 1639, Thomas Wenlick’s recusant wife Joan, who lived at Longnor, was interred in the churchyard. Her body had been brought into the parish by three men from the vicinity of Ludlow, in the diocese of Hereford, without the ‘knowledge or consent’ of the minister or churchwardens of Leebottwood. At least some conforming parishioners must have been aware of the plans. Interment in the church itself implied some complicity on the part of a local parish official to secure entry.

We can infer an unwillingness to record or report the uncanonical burial of recusants by comparing the 1607 Recusancy Returns for Staffordshire with entries in the relevant parish registers, recorded over the ensuing years. The dearth of names from the Returns of 1607 in the registers may indicate that those listed had moved away, or died in a state of excommunication. Buried privately in the

⁹⁴ See Hathersage.

⁹⁵ Bossy, *The English Catholic Community*, p.142

⁹⁶ B/C/5, 1626, Handsworth.

churchyard without the ministrations of the local incumbent, he was unable to register their names as faithful departed members of the established church, but prepared to overlook such infringements of canonical law.

The 1607 Return of recusants for the archdeaconry of Stafford was drawn up in response to the 114th Canon of 1604, which required that clergy should send lists of all those 'popishly given' within their parishes, to be annually received by their ordinaries each Christmas Day, who would then pass them on to those in authority.⁹⁷ The records were to distinguish between absolute recusants, those who regularly absented themselves from their parish church, and half-recusants, who attended the services but refused to participate in Communion. The 1607 return is the only one from the archdeaconry which survives for the reign of James. Comprising 80 individual returns, it is by no means a complete survey of all the parishes in Stafford.⁹⁸ The parishes of Rocester, Seighford and Sedgley have been chosen from this list for detailed analysis.⁹⁹

The return for Rocester was made by Robert Smyth, the curate, and Robert Adams and Richard Gallymore, the churchwardens. The list contained 14 names, each person described as 'recusant excommunicate'. The first six names were associated with the Chetwind family: Thomas Chetwind, gentleman, Dorothy his wife and William their son, with three of their servants, Robert Wetton, Robert Wilson and Grace Bill. The others were a widowed gentlewoman, the wives of two husbandmen, a labourer's wife, two tailors, a cottager and a man whose status is not recorded. All but one of the recusants recorded in 1607 are absent from the

⁹⁷ Greenslade, '1607 Return of Staffordshire Catholics', p.6.

⁹⁸ A comparison of the 1607 returns with the comperta of 1617 reveals a general correspondence between the two sets of figures, although there are some exceptions. The parish of Draycot-in-the-Moors shows an increase of 11 recusants, to a total of 28 in 1617; Sedgley, near Wolverhampton, was reported as containing 16, with one half recusant in 1607, by 1617 the number of recusants was put at 25. Handsworth apparently contained only 4 in the early return; in the 1617 comperta 16 persons were presented, among whom were 'Edrus Stanford' armiger' and 'Carolus Stanford'. Amongst the 16 were 4 half-recusants. There are other examples showing the reverse, i.e. Stone: 9(1607), 4(1617); Walsall: 11 recusants and 2 half-recusants (1607), 5 recusants only (1617).

⁹⁹ These were chosen because they were available in print at LJRO. The office had the originals on microfiche, but these proved to be illegible. The originals are held in Stafford. See also section on Church Papists for further comments on 1607 Return and these parishes, pp.182-184.

burial register, the only entry being that of the excommunicate Joan Green, who was interred at night.¹⁰⁰ The seventeenth century was a time of considerable mobility, but it does seem unlikely that all those listed in 1607 would have left the parish. Because of their non-appearance it is probable that a number had died excommunicate, and were therefore buried without the local incumbent officiating at the service for the 'Burial of the Dead', but with his acquiescence. In the parish of Seighford, the vicar John Yardley reported that there were 11 recusants. Eight names from the 1607 list are absent from the burial register.¹⁰¹ Again it is probable that those who remained in the parish were given nocturnal burial in the churchyard, possibly with the vicar's knowledge. At Sedgley the incumbent was Richard Browne.¹⁰² A conscientious vicar, he held the living for over fifty years, until his death in 1625. In 1607 he presented 16 recusants and one half-recusant, the gentleman Edward Hall the elder.¹⁰³ When Elizabeth Haughton died in a state of excommunication for recusancy, Browne obtained a warrant from Bishop Morton to bury her.¹⁰⁴ No warrant had been deemed necessary for Edward Hall's wife, Elizabeth, when she had died in 1615. Apart from Haughton and Hall there is no record of anyone else from the list of 1607 in the register's list of burials. Walter Hall (Edward's son) was still being presented for recusancy in 1629.¹⁰⁵

Despite a relatively large recusant population, it appears that presentments for illegal burial, and non-compliance in other Anglican rites were disproportionately small. This suggests either careless or latitudinarian attitudes on the part of the local parochial officers, both ministers and churchwardens. In 1623, the churchwardens of Draycott-in-the-Moors, Staffordshire (which had a

¹⁰⁰ See pp.168-169.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Whitmore, 'a poore lame wretch', in the Return is probably the woman of the same name who was buried on January 21st., 1616, 'Eliz. Whitmore, a poore woman and widow'.

¹⁰² H.R.Thomas(ed.), *S.P.R.S. Sedgley*, (Newcastle-under-Lyme, 1941).

¹⁰³ Browne wrote that 'Hall doth not as yet conform himself to the receiving of the holy communion although he doth resort unto the church and there stay the whole time of divine service sermons'.

¹⁰⁴ 1623, 'May 25th., 'Elizabeth Haughton, widow an exom. for recusancy by a warrant from my lord byshop of this diocese, May 25th.'

¹⁰⁵ B/V/1/52.

large recusant population) were charged that ‘havinge knoledge of divers papisticall recusantes to bee by your confession... within the said parishe...and especiallie within the house of master Draycotte Lord of the mannour there, [you] have neglected and omitted to present such there absence and defect’.¹⁰⁶ The case is remarkable not because they failed to present these non-conformists, but because they were reported for their dereliction of duty.

Some parishioners may have regarded informing on their Catholic neighbours as offending against a code of neighbourliness which took precedence over ties of religious affiliation.¹⁰⁷ When, in 1598, the local sheriffs and their officers came to sequester the goods of the West Bromwich yeoman, Simon Ryder, over thirty persons used physical force to stop them. Not all were known recusants. As Marie Rowlands comments, ‘Simon was clearly a man who was firmly entrenched in his own community, prosperous, active and respected’.¹⁰⁸ When, in 1620, Catholic priests came to Bilston to exorcise William Perry, the attempted deliverance was attended by a number of local Protestants who were apparently more interested in being present than in reporting the event to the authorities.¹⁰⁹ The concept of not shopping neighbours was a contributory factor to the strength of recusancy in the area around Wolverhampton, which caused Richard Lee to declare that ‘Rome’s snaky brood roosted and rested themselves warmer or safer’ in the town than anywhere else in England.¹¹⁰ Neither was this reluctance confined to the middle or lower sorts. Keith Wrightson has drawn attention to the two concepts of order pertaining in the seventeenth century. The one, embraced by local magistrates, saw order as a ‘coherent structure of social relationships and moral values’; parish officers, on the other hand, tended to adopt a less ideologically-bound definition, regarding order as an absence of local

¹⁰⁶ L.J.R.O., B/C/5/1623, Draycott-in-the-Moors.

¹⁰⁷ J.A.Sharpe, *Early Modern England* (London, 1997), pp.96-97.

¹⁰⁸ S.A.H.Burne (ed.), ‘Staffordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls’, in *CH.*, (1935), p.41; Marie Rowlands, ‘“Rome’s Snaky Brood”: Catholic Yeomen, Craftsmen and Townsmen in the West Midlands, 1600-1641’, *Recusant History*, 24:2 (1998), pp. 147-166.

¹⁰⁹ R.Baddeley, *The Boy of Bilson* (London, 1622), p.51.

¹¹⁰ R.Lee, *The Spiritual Spring*, (London, 1625), introduction; *V.C.H., Staffordshire*, vol iii, p.104.

conflict. In religious matters this parochial ideal appears to have extended to some of the local magistrates themselves. According to Anthony Petti, Staffordshire J.P.s had strong ties of friendship and kinship, and sometimes of religious affiliation, with recusants, 'and most justices had at least one relative who was a recusant'. This led them, on occasions, to turn a blind eye to those 'ill-affected in religion'. There was also a certain reluctance among these officers, in recusancy as in other issues, to comply to the letter to central governmental edicts which were perceived as unduly interfering or coercive. Some local J.P.s lacked the heart to carry out these directives. When, in 1620, Walter Bagot (1557-1623) was asked to be part of a recusant commission on behalf of the Exchequer, he declared to Robert Aston, a fellow J.P., 'I have no mynd to the busines and wold willinglie have a clenlie shift to avoyde yt'.¹¹¹

The Life of the Catholic Community

How did the Catholic community maintain itself during these years of proscription? Missionary priests played a major role in leading worship, teaching and pastoring their charges. A number based themselves in gentry homes, serving the family and its servants, but sometimes also able to minister to a cross-section of local people. Before his martyrdom at Newcastle-under Lyme in 1618, William Southerne's ministry on the estate of the Fowlers of St. Thomas, Bassage, Staffordshire, was chiefly among the poor. The authorities seized him in the act of saying mass.¹¹² In Staffordshire, Jesuits visited and served co-religionists in, for instance, Alton, Boscobel, Moseley, Stafford, Stone and Tixall, the home of the Aston family, where Father Francis Foster was a frequent guest. The

¹¹¹ K.Wrightson, 'Two Concepts of Order: justices, constables and jurymen in seventeenth-century England', in J.Brewer and J.Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People. The English and Their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New Brunswick, 1980), pp.21-46; A.G.Petti, 'Roman Catholicism in Elizabethan and Jacobean Staffordshire', *C.H.S.*, 4th.series, 9, (1979), pp. xiii, xiv, xvi, 84.

¹¹² R. Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests* (Dublin, 1874), vol.ii, pp.55-62.

Derbyshire District of the Society of Jesus was established in 1633, and had an average of ten priests working in the field from its inception.¹¹³ In 1626 the churchwardens at Albrighton had reported that 'one Lee...cometh and goeth oftentimes unto Mr. John Harrington's house...suspected of being a seminarie priest'.¹¹⁴

Other priests led a more peripatetic existence. Travelling either on foot or by horseback, they sought to reach a wider body of Catholics, and restore backsliders. Staying at a local Catholic home for a few days, their services were available to adherents in the area. 'The chief part of the harvest fell to this active class which was exposed to special danger'.¹¹⁵ Early in the seventeenth century, John Sugar of Wombourne, travelled through Warwickshire, Staffordshire (and Worcestershire) 'to serve, help, and comfort the meaner and poorer sort of Catholics with the sacraments of the holy Catholic Church'. Arrested and imprisoned at Warwick in 1604, he was later martyred.¹¹⁶

The *comperta* give several examples of the activities of priests among those members of the middling sort who solicited their aid. These included Edward Dickinson of Bradley, Elizabeth Knott of Killmaston, who was churched 'as is thought by a seminary', and Richard Ince of Eckington who had a 'childe borne and christened in his home and in the night' - presumably by a priest moving under cover of darkness. So did the recusants John and Joan Bradshall of Middle, who were 'maried but we know not by whome havinge a child as some say baptized by a popish prieste'.¹¹⁷ In 1620, when William Perry of Bilston counterfeited demon-possession, local Catholics persuaded his parents to call on the aid of clerical exorcists. They managed to obtain the services of three, each of whom pursued his calling in lay disguise. The third priest to arrive at the Perry

¹¹³ Foley, *Records of English Province*, vol.ii, pp.93,274; SP 16/178/43.

¹¹⁴ B/V/1/48, p.48.

¹¹⁵ Foley, *Records of English Province*, vol.i, p.217.

¹¹⁶ Challoner, *Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, vol.ii, p.9.

¹¹⁷ B/V/1/30, p.32; /1/26, pp.41-2, 46; /1/60, p.26.

home had been sent for by a local weaver, which indicates the existence of an efficient local network to secure priestly assistance.¹¹⁸

What evidence is there of attempts to instil a new devotion in the hearts of the faithful? Some Catholics reveal a deeply traditional piety, well illustrated in the story of Father Thomas Fitzherbert of Swinnerton. Brought up in a Catholic home, he claimed that his calling to the Jesuits had been occasioned by his special dedication to 'the Blessed Virgin'. At the age of 20 he vowed daily to recite her office and, amongst other self-imposed devotions, 'to recite daily one pair of beads, but on Saturday two; also on her feasts to confess and communicate, and to recite the whole Rosary'. The Sedgley yeoman Henry Hodgetts was also traditionalist, and as he lay dying the Jesuit in attendance was puzzled by his preoccupation with St. Chad until it was explained that the relics of St. Chad, which had been taken from Lichfield Cathedral at the time of the Reformation, had been hidden in Hodgett's bedstead.¹¹⁹

Literature could be an important means to inculcate the Faith, especially as priests were not always at hand.¹²⁰ There is some indication that Catholic books circulated widely in the diocese. In 1602, John Rhodes observed that there were many Catholic pamphlets in existence, 'together with like Romish wares, that are sent abroad amongst the common people, both Protestants and Papists in London and in the country, and that by certaine women Brokers and Peddlers (as of late in Staffordshire there was) who with baskets under their arms shall come and offer you other wares under a colour, and so sell you these'. Michael Sparke, a London stationer, recalled in the 1650s that he had travelled around Shropshire in the period of his apprenticeship, 1603-1610, selling Catholic books.¹²¹ In 1616, a Derbyshire bagpiper was caught selling beads, crucifixes and books in

¹¹⁸ Baddeley, *Boy of Bilson*, pp.63-4.

¹¹⁹ Foley, *Records of English Province*, vol.ii, pp.207-8; vol. vii, p.489. The priest subsequently removed them for safe keeping.

¹²⁰ See A. Walsham, '“Domme Preachers”? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the Culture of Print', *Past and Present*, no.168, August 2000, pp.72-123.

¹²¹ John Rhodes, *An Answer to a Romish Rime Lately Printed* (London, 1602), preface; M. Sparke, *A second beacon fired by Scintilla* (London, 1652), pp.5-6.

Nottinghamshire. Robert Fox was brought to the attention of Marchington churchwardens for carrying a 'pack of popish pamphlets up and down to sell'.¹²² A catalogue of the books of the Protestant Staffordshire lady, Frances Wolfreston includes a copy of the 1620 edition of Laurence Vaux's *A Catechisme*, probably inherited from her Catholic mother, and also indicative of the availability of Catholic books. Simon Ryder, the recusant yeoman from West Bromwich, had a study with books, in which proscribed religious literature must have held an honoured place.¹²³

Some Catholic material was also available in manuscript. Alexandra Walsham has drawn attention to scribal publications, which she regards as 'a safer medium for the transmission of subversive and oppositional material'. An account of the attempted exorcism of William Perry, 'the boy of Bilson', was delivered to Thomas Nechills, a local gentleman, by the priest, Wheeler, for the edification of the faithful. He asked Nechills to have it copied, and to give one account to Phillip Higgins, a West Bromwich yeoman.¹²⁴

Like the Puritans, Catholics also strengthened their faith in those aspects of their religion which were communal. John Gee reported that at Holywell in 1623, and 'once every year about midsummer many superstitious papists of Lancashire, Staffordshire and other remote counties go in pilgrimage, especially those of the feminine and softer sex, who keep these their rendezvous, meeting with divers priests their acquaintances, who make it their chief synod or convention for ... promoting the Catholic cause as they call it'. With regard to the mass, it was reported that a number frequented Mow Cop, in north Staffordshire, and other desolate areas in 1641, having been forced to do so because of Parliament's punitive legal and financial sanctions. Discovered by a shepherd who heard the tinkling of a bell when searching for his lost sheep, 'great number of people

¹²² T. Watt, *Cheap Print and Piety* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 178; B/V/1/38, p. 25.

¹²³ P. Morgan, 'Frances Wolfreston and "Her Books"', *The Library*, 6th series, 11 (1989), pp. 197-219; M. B. Rowlands, ' "Rome's Snaky Brood" ', p. 149.

¹²⁴ Walsham, ' "Domme Preachers" ', pp. 83-85; Baddeley, *Boy of Bilson*, p. 75.

kneeling down' were found in the act of celebrating the mass. Legislation in this instance was a catalyst for greater solidarity amongst some recusants.¹²⁵

A communal sense of religious identity can also be perceived in the recusant burials, and in the confidence displayed by Catholics living, with or without seigneurial protection, in areas with a relatively large Catholic population. Such solidarity may have given them a boldness which individuals or smaller groups did not always possess. In 1633, at the Ellesmere chapelries of Dadalstone and Penley sixteen recusants were presented for not bringing their children to be baptised, while at Albrighton in 1639, 37 recusants were excommunicated 'for bringinge up their children in the popish religion'.¹²⁶ In such parishes, Catholic solidarity was sufficient to intimidate Protestants. In 1613, Thomas Draxe, vicar of Colwich, wrote to Walter Bagot asking for help and counsel in dealing with a large number of Catholics in his charge. 'I have in my parish', he wrote, 'young and old, some 40 recusant papists, who would eat me if they could'.¹²⁷

Some individuals felt able to express their contempt for the Church by law established. Some did so singly by long-standing absence from parochial worship. In 1609/10, the gentlewoman Dorothea Andrewes of Meriden was presented for not having attended her parish church for eleven years, a 'luxury' which perhaps only someone in her position could afford. In the same *comperta*, Thomas Cheese was accused of having been a recusant for six years. At Cheswardine, Shropshire, in 1633, Alice Mullimax had been absent for a period in excess of seven years, but the diocesan record probably goes to the Derbyshire yeoman, William Parsons of Stretton, who was convicted for recusancy eleven times in the period 1605-1638. His family and their connections formed the core of recusancy within the parish.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ P.Caraman, *The Years of Siege* (London, 1966), p.30; *Strange News from Staffordshire* (1641).

¹²⁶ B/V/1/53, p.16; 1/59, p.64: B/V/1/65.

¹²⁷ 'Three Letters of Thomas Draxe', *CHS*, p.270.

¹²⁸ B/V/1/22, pp.10-11; 1/54, p.6; R.Clark, 'Anglicanism, Recusancy and Dissent in Derbyshire, 1603-1730 (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1979), pp.65-71.

Other individuals were outspoken in their defiance. When exhorted to attend her parish church at Gnosall, Staffordshire, in 1616, Margaret Starkey retorted that 'the devil was there and did sitt on their shoulders that heard the word preached or service read'. Richard Cartwright of Weston, Shropshire, who was 'suspected to be a papist' was equally forthright. He was presented for absenting himself from the service and as a 'depraver' of religion and ministers, declaring that 'there ys no true minister, they are but prating knaves'. At Stapenhill, Derbyshire, in 1636, Thomas Winter showed his contempt for the English version of the Bible by declaring it had been falsely translated.¹²⁹

In 1635 Lucy Pierce of Coleshill was described by her churchwardens as an obstinate recusant, and 'one that [did] scoffe at the censure of our church as if exco[mun]icacon did but exclude her from such [as] she intends to exclude herself'. Henry Hodgetts of Sedgley, an obstinate papist, had appeared before the consistory court in 1626 charged with speaking contemptuously of the Protestant rite of holy communion, the Prayer Book and other rites and ceremonies. Amongst other offences he was accused of attempting to seduce (persuade) others to become Catholics, a charge also levelled against Lucy Pierce, which reveals both the confidence of some Catholics and their zeal to propagate their Faith.¹³⁰ The ecclesiastical authorities regarded such activities as pernicious. In the 1607 Staffordshire recusancy return, Richard Potte of Seighford had been described as being 'an obstinate, wilful and dangerous papist of no trade or science but a seducer of the ignorant', while at Yoxhall, also in Staffordshire, in 1623, Francis Arnold was accused of being an 'absolute recusant and a seducer of people from the church and hath done much hurt therein'.¹³¹ In 1635, the Bushbury churchwardens presented Andrea Moseley, a member of the gentry family in the parish, because she had 'laboured to seduce Jane, wife of John Egginton, from our religion', and at Rocester, Mr. William Thompson and Thomas Greene of were

¹²⁹ B/V/1/33, p.51;

¹³⁰ B/V/1/56, p.12; B/C/5, 1626, Sedgley.

¹³¹ B/V/1/46, p.44.

excommunicated 'for seducing others to popery'. At Osmaston, Derbyshire, in 1636, Humphrey Pegge, senior, was presented as an obstinate, seducing recusant, while his son Humphrey was reported for harbouring recusants during service time.¹³² Some Catholics were almost as zealous as the Puritans in making the most of any opportunity to share their Faith. In 1635, Abbera Andrews, wife of the proprietor of the Crown inn, Bridgnorth, was presented because she 'seduceth scholars at table at her house'. She was a persuasive advocate: when one scholar was asked why he did not attend church he replied, 'what, should he go to the devil?' Back in Staffordshire in 1637, two tailors, John Collins of Lapley and Thomas Pierce of Wheaton Aston were working together at the home of the recusant Humfrey Mason at Lapley. Collins used the occasion to attempt to convert his Protestant co-worker, with the exhortation, 'Thomas, it is now tyme for you to alter y[our] religion, if you have any hope of your soule's health'. Pierce replied that it would be better for Collins to observe the laws and attend church, and was met with the response that Collins 'would not regard our Church noe moore then a swynestye' and 'would suffer death before that hee would goe to the Church'. The conversation was reported to the authorities.¹³³

A battle was also taking place for the hearts of the young. Churchwardens were charged to be on their guard for those who taught children without a licence; teaching Catholic doctrines to the young was regarded as especially harmful. At Marlebrooke, John Tompson was excommunicated for teaching children, 'neither is he conformable to the Religion nowe established'. At Aldrich, Alice, the wife of Richard Copper(?), taught children without a licence; neither did she attend her parish church, while at Lapley, a recusant was accused of having a private school in his home.¹³⁴ In 1636, Joanna Symons of Church Eaton was presented as 'a popish recusant [who] teacheth school, while in the same archdeaconry, Dorothea

¹³² Greenslade, 'The 1607 Return', p.19; Wanklyn, 'Shropshire Recusants in 1635', pp.11,13; Hampartumian, 'Staffordshire Recusants', pp.7, 23; B/V/1/59, Osmaston, pp.61,2.

¹³³ SRO, Q/SR. M.1637, f.26; Hampartumian, 'Staffs. Recusants', p.8.

¹³⁴ All B/V/1/45.

Cooke was also reported as a recusant who kept a school. At Wem, in 1639, Thomas Phillips was described as ‘a popish recusant and a schoolmaster’. The church courts were not always effective in suppressing such teaching. At Stoke-on-Trent in 1633, Margaret Ford, a recusant, was presented because she ‘teacheth schoole’; three years later she was excommunicated, with her husband, for the same offence.¹³⁵ In 1625, the home of Anne Vaux, the sister of Lord Vaux, Stanley Grange, near West Hallam, Derbyshire was searched by Sir John Coke who discovered two chapels, and ‘beds and furniture ... in that little house to lodge forty or fifty persons at the least’. The school was run by Jesuits, and it was not until ten years later that the penny dropped and the authorities moved to have the school closed down.¹³⁶

Church Papists

The Catholic community within the diocese was greater than those who could be classified as recusants, for it included a large number of ‘church papists’. Alexandra Walsham has written that for Catholics to survive and thrive in communities largely Protestant, there had to be a considerable measure of accommodation, ‘not least because the Church of England remained the administrative agent for parish rates and an important source of personal income and prestige for tithe farmers, and those who enjoyed the patronage rights of ecclesiastical property’. There were further good reasons:

‘for continuing to utilise its “social services”: the taint of illegitimacy blighted infants whose baptisms were not officially registered, and serious legal difficulties over the settlements of estates could follow clandestine marriages contracted by missionaries. Bribing the parson to fiddle the books and double ceremonies were not uncommon, but “unseasonable coming in” at the end of official services for the administration of the sacraments

¹³⁵ B/V/1/61, p.55, 59; 1/65, p.124; 1/54, p.23, 1/64, p.97.

¹³⁶ M.Hodgetts, ‘A Topographical Index of Hiding Places II’, *Recusant History*, 24:1 (1998), p.12; SP 16/294/74; 16/299/36.

was equally well-known ... desire to be interred in consecrated ground also compelled many to acquiesce in Protestant burial rites or conduct their own nocturnal funerals in the churchyard'.¹³⁷

Some church papists, although attending parochial worship, made clear their dislike of the proceedings. It may be significant that of the few recorded instances of 'active' protest at Protestant services, three occurred in the period 1609-1610, in the earliest extant records. These examples may signify that discontented Catholics came to recognise that public demonstrations of disapproval laid them open to official censure and were counter-productive.¹³⁸

The Warwickshire *comperta* of 1609-1610 show the problems that church papists encountered during the celebration of Holy Communion. Should they participate, or not? William Bonshawe of St. Michael's, Coventry, and Thomas Jorden of Sowe were presented for genuflecting before they partook.¹³⁹ At Kenilworth, five recusants, present in the church at the time of communion, genuflected at the time of the reception of the bread, but refused to eat the element.¹⁴⁰ Another example of a church papist whose conscience gave evidence of troubling him during service time was Matthew(?) Isham, who, in 1614, was presented by the Hillmorton officials for 'bringing a papist book to church on the Saboath Day'.¹⁴¹ Ralph Davenport expressed his unhappiness at attending Leek parish church in 1617 by walking about during the service so that he would not hear the word; John Woldrich of Chebsey would not place himself in such danger, and was absent from worship when it included a sermon.¹⁴² All these public acts of protest, weak though some of them were, may have found their *raison d'être* in the teaching of Thomas Bell, who in the 1590s defended the practice of qualified

¹³⁷ A. Walsham, *Church Papists*, p.85.

¹³⁸ The following examples, by their nature, look like instances of Catholic protest, as opposed to Puritan protest, or general anti-clericalism. They are fewer in number than the church-based protests of the reformed.

¹³⁹ B/V/1/22, Coventry, p.6, 'William Bonshawe recusavit communionem flexis genibq'; Sowe, p.29, Thomas Jorden, 'recusat communionem flexis gen'.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.23, 'genna flectore tempe receptionis coene dni et non recipiunt'.

¹⁴¹ B/V/1/29, Warwickshire, p.1.

¹⁴² B/V/1/34, p.30; /1/45.

conformity, provided that the reluctant conformist gave clear indication to the congregation of his disapproval of the proceedings.¹⁴³

The most common form of church papist dissension was a refusal to participate in Holy Communion.¹⁴⁴ In addition to the 284 recusant returns for Staffordshire in 1607, 14 persons were recorded as 'half-papists', which the 114th Canon of 1604 defined as those 'who, though they come to church, yet do refuse to receive the communion'.¹⁴⁵ Amongst these half-papists were husbands of recusant wives who attended church to avoid the financial penalties which their absence would otherwise incur. In 1607, the immediate members of the family of the gentleman Edward Hall stayed away from Sedgley church. Richard Browne, the vicar, observed that Hall himself, 'although he doth resort unto the church and there stay the whole time of divine service and sermons ... doth not as yet conform himself to the receiving of the holy communion'. Amongst the same returns, four wives of Tamworth men were reported as recusants; their husbands, a gentleman, two malsters and a butcher were all recorded as 'half-recusants'. The level of presentments for non-participation varied from archdeaconry to archdeaconry. In 1636 the diocesan *comperta* returns of those who failed either to communicate at Easter or to communicate at all showed an increase on the 1607 figure in Staffordshire with 42 presentments. In addition, 53 were recorded from Derbyshire, 48 from Warwickshire and 8 from Shropshire in the same year.¹⁴⁶ Clearly, even after a period of over 75 years, there was a significant minority who attended parish worship, but whose consciences were not fully at ease with the Protestant settlement.

¹⁴³ A. Walsham, '“Yielding to the Extremity of the Time”: Conformity, Orthodoxy and the Post-Reformation Catholic Community', in P.Lake and M.Questier, (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c.1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp.211-237.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Greenslade, 'The 1607 Return of Staffs. Catholics', pp.6-32.

¹⁴⁶ The Staffordshire presentments also included 527 for recusancy, 42:527, a ratio of 1:12.5; Derbyshire, 53:341, ratio of 1:6.43; Warwickshire, 48:105, ratio of 1:2.19 and Salop, 8:48, ratio of 1:6.

Another sign of church papism was irregular attendance at parochial worship. Some church-papists were absent more often than present. In 1607, Nicholas Paston, parson at Kingswinford, recorded 'one Elizabeth Broughton, wife of John Broughton gent, who this last year came twice to church refusing recusancy, but this year last past she neither cometh to church nor receiveth the Holy Communion'.¹⁴⁷ She is an example of someone who, in 1606, appears to have done far less than the minimum required, and yet avoided being presented for recusancy. One wonders how infrequently some church papists, classified in the records as 'rarely coming to church' or not 'frequenting church', attended worship, and yet eluded recusant categorisation. In 1636, 28 were presented for poor attendance in Staffordshire, 15 in Derbyshire, over 60 in Warwickshire, and 19 in Shropshire. These figures must have included the irreligious and the indifferent, but a significant number were probably convinced Catholics who managed to 'sail as close to the wind' as possible, and yet avoided the designation of 'recusant'.

Church papists took many different positions on the level of conformity they were prepared to make, and some individuals modified their position over time, probably in response to changing external pressures. We can explore this diversity by comparing once more the 1607 Staffordshire Returns with the parish registers of Rocester and Seighford and Sedgley.¹⁴⁸ Conformity could be limited in practice and in duration. Of the 14 names originally returned as 'recusant excommunicate' for Rocester, just 5 were later to be found in the parish register.¹⁴⁹ Only one, 'Robert Dreaket,' presumably no longer an excommunicate, was registered amongst the parish burials.¹⁵⁰ At Seighford, John Yardley, the vicar, described Richard Potte as a seducing and dangerous papist. Despite this, Pott subsequently had his son Peter baptised in the parish church, and two years

¹⁴⁷ Greenslade, '1607 Return', p.31. By the statute of 1581, an absence of four weeks was enough to qualify for a conviction for recusancy.

¹⁴⁸ See pp. 170-171.

¹⁴⁹ F.J.Wrottesley (ed.), *Staffordshire Parish Register Society, Rocester*, ('printed privately', 1906).

¹⁵⁰ *Rocester*, p.50.

later the service was repeated for his son George.¹⁵¹ Richard Woolrich 'of Little Bridgeford, cottiar and Margery, his wife', reported as absolute recusants in 1607, were buried in June and July 1630 respectively. They must have conformed during the interim, and their names are not mentioned amongst the recusants listed in the 1629 *comperta*.¹⁵² Nevertheless 8 of the original 11 recusants are absent from the burial register, possibly an indication of the transitory nature of some church papists' 'conformity'. In 1607, Richard Browne of Sedgley presented 16 recusants. Over the following years a number of them had their children baptised by him.¹⁵³ Despite this, there is only one person from the 1607 list whose name appears in the burial section of the register. From these records the impression emerges that Catholics, and sometimes very convinced ones like Richard Potte of Seighford, could and did conform at least to some of the rites of the Church of England. Their obedience would appear to be partial, as their absence from the burial registers implies, and was probably imposed on them because of the costs involved in non-conformity, rather than by any collective change of heart.

The movement from recusancy to church papism and back again is indicative both of a certain flexibility amongst the Catholic community, and an open attitude to the practice of church papism. This is also apparent at Biddulph in 1635, when 26 were presented as recusants. The 1641 return contained 34 names, but this was not a simple increase of 8. 21 new names had been added to the later list, while 13 of the 1635 figure had 'disappeared'. Presumably some of the 13 had conformed in a measure. It would be highly unlikely that those missing from the 1641 list had all become persuaded Protestants in the meantime.¹⁵⁴ Michael Questier has recently argued that recusant and church papist stances were held with a greater plasticity than some historians have

¹⁵¹ N.W.Tildesley (ed.), *S.P.R.S. Seighford*, (no date), pp.27-29.

¹⁵² B/V/1/52.

¹⁵³ i.e. Thomas, Philip and Nicholas Haughton, Anne Lawe, Thomas Bullock and William Hodgetts.

¹⁵⁴ Hampartumian, 'Staffordshire Recusants in 1635', pp.12-13; Kettle, 'List of Staffordshire Recusants, 1641', pp. 33-4.

allowed, both positions frequently generated by social rather than religious concerns. Amongst the Catholic community within the diocese there is certainly evidence of an ebb and flow between church papism and recusancy, probably resulting from changes in ecclesiastical policy, nationally and locally.¹⁵⁵

Individuals who made a more committed shift to conformity can be traced through the Conformity Certificates for the reigns of Elizabeth, James and Charles. Most were convicted recusants who had now 'either been present at divine service and received communion, or [had] promised to do so, or in some cases [had] brought certificates from [their] vicar' to confirm that they had done so'.¹⁵⁶ 132 certificates for the period 1563-1627 have been found, of which the bishops of London issued twenty-six, the bishops of Worcester twenty and the bishops of Coventry and Lichfield thirteen.¹⁵⁷ During Overton's episcopate (1580-1609), nine people were certified as conforming, eight in 1594, and one in 1598.¹⁵⁸ The majority of the certificates were issued to members of the gentry in the time of Bishop Overall (1614-1618). They confirmed the conformity of George Mattheue and Anne, his wife, of Berkswell, 'George has for divers years frequented the church; Anne is very sick', Edward Fitzherbert, of Sudbury in Derbyshire, Henry Warner of Ryton-in-Dunsmore, Warwickshire, Thomas Wollrich of Ancot near Eccleshall, Staffordshire, Elizabeth Hanslopp and 'Master Walter Hanslopp' of Thurlaston in Leicestershire (a peculiar) and Elizabeth Gray, 'the relict of Edward Grey' of Shifnal in Shropshire. Alongside these gentry figures can be added William Adams of Wem, Salop. With the exception of George and Anne Matthew, the certificates were all issued in 1615. Under the

¹⁵⁵ M. Questier, 'Conformity, Catholicism and the Law', in P. Lake and M. Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c.1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp.237-261.

¹⁵⁶ D.M. Clarke, 'Conformity Certificates among the King's Bench Records', *Recusant History*, 14 (1997-98), pp.147-65.

¹⁵⁷ Of the other dioceses, Chester issued 11, York and Hereford 9 each, Peterborough 7, Norwich 5, Oxford, Lincoln, Bristol and Winchester 4, Canterbury and Exeter 3, and Ely, Salisbury and Llandaff one each.

¹⁵⁸ Certificate 13/37 contains five names. Places of domicile were Hampstall Ridware, and Clifton Campville, and possibly Norbury in Staffordshire, and Roston and Norbury in Derbyshire. Norbury rectory in Staffordshire is situated in the deanery of Lapley and Trysull; Norbury rectory in Derbyshire in the deanery of Ashbourne.

episcopate of Thomas Morton, whose anti-Catholic stance was much more pronounced than Overall's, only three certificates were given, up until 1627. One of these was for Thomas Yeoman, a miller from Wem, in 1620. The other two were confirmations of long-standing conformity. Also from Wem, George Merrick's certificate declared that he 'was never suspected to be inclined to the popish religion', while Thomas Martaine, from Madeley in Staffordshire 'hath come to church since his childhood'. How genuine were such protestations of orthodoxy? The absence of the Matthews of Berkswell, Edward Fitzherbert of Sudbury, Warner of Ryton and Elizabeth Grey of Shifnal from the *comperta* indicates, at the least, a semblance of conformity. As the gentry played an important role in the maintenance of Catholicism amongst their dependants, any 'conversions' amongst them must have had wider repercussions, but the number who conformed, according to the certificates, was too small a fraction of the recusant gentry in the diocese to have had a significant impact.

The diocese of Coventry and Lichfield contained a sizable minority of Catholics in all walks of life. The *comperta* show an increase in presentments for recusancy in the 1620s, probably reflecting Bishop Morton's zeal, rather than an actual increase in numbers. Amongst Catholics the ideal of separation from the established church was frequently undermined by economic and social considerations which led many to some degree of outward conformity. It is clear, nonetheless, that Catholicism retained a remarkable hold among all "sorts" of people.

The situation within the diocese often matches Bossy's contention that by 1600 Catholicism was largely seigneurial. Nevertheless, there is also evidence of a Catholicism which was only semi-dependent, and in some instances independent of seigneurial protection. There were a number of parishes, such as Chesterfield (1609), Etwall (1614), Killamarsh (1623) and Ellesmere, which apparently lacked

a powerful Catholic landlord but still contained numbers of recusants. Furthermore, some individuals, living in parishes without gentry protection, had priests who visited their homes to minister to them and their families.¹⁵⁹ These indicate channels or networks by which priests could be secured that were, at least, semi-independent of seigneurial influence. A.G. Dickens has written that in Yorkshire there was a significant non-gentry section amongst the recusant population which was cultivated by the priests; the examples above suggest that something similar obtained in Coventry and Lichfield.¹⁶⁰

What of Haigh's comment that by the 1630s the Catholic church had become a tiny, introspective group, with missionaries unable to sustain Catholic loyalties and with some areas and social groups lost to the faith, and his contention that the mission for the conversion of England had become merely an agency for the provision of private chaplains for the gentry?¹⁶¹ Some parishes which reported recusants in the earlier years of the century, such as Bourton-on-Dunsmore, Meriden and Offchurch, in Warwickshire, presented none by the 1630s. This is balanced, however, by parishes where presentments remained fairly constant or even increased over the same period, as at Eckington, Hathersage, Chesterfield and Norbury in Derbyshire. Overall the recusancy pattern of the diocese of the 1610s was, at the least, sustained up to the 1640s. The community was resilient and self-supportive, and Catholic culture deeply rooted, surviving official proscription. It tolerated occasional conformity as a practical necessity, even from amongst its most committed members, and such pragmatism, aided by a culture of neighbourliness, helped to secure its survival. The size of the Staffordshire recusant return of 1641 highlights the failure of the established Church to make inroads into local Catholicism, and provides ample

¹⁵⁹ E.g., see above, p.174.

¹⁶⁰ See the early example of John Sugar, p.38; A.G.Dickens, 'The Extent and Character of Recusancy in Yorkshire, 1604, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, xxxvii (1948-1952), p.42.

¹⁶¹ Haigh, 'From Monopoly to Minority: Catholicism in Early Modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, xxxi (1981), pp.132,146-7; *ibid.*, 'Church of England, the Catholics and the People'.

evidence, when compared with the return of 1607, to show that the Faith was successfully passed on to the next generation. However, estimating whether the community had grown over this period, in proportion to other religious groups in the diocese, is more problematic, because of the inaccuracy of all the returns, and particularly of those made before 1641.

The coincidence of high recusancy figures in parishes with gentry recusants implies that the gentry were mindful of their responsibilities to co-religionists dependent on them or living in the locality. In some areas there were strong, self-confident Catholic communities, for instance at Colwich, Hathersage, Handsworth and Albrighton. There are also individual examples of Catholics who tenaciously held on to the Faith and sought to proselytise their Protestant neighbours. Such evangelistic zeal cannot have existed in a vacuum, and bears indirect witness to the strength of the community and to the ministry of seminary priests. There is little evidence of any social groups having been lost to the Faith.

Catholics throughout the land, in the period 1625-1640, may have experienced a growing confidence in their Faith. According to Thomas McCoog, 'many agreed that [they] had not fared so well since the reign of Mary Tudor', and Catholics in the diocese might well have concurred.¹⁶²

¹⁶² T.M.McCoog, *English and Welsh Jesuits, 1555-1650* (London, 1994), part v, p.24.

CHAPTER 5

The Episcopate of Robert Wright

William Prynne, commenting on the bishops in the 1630's, declared: 'how active all those prelates were to set up altars, introduce all Popish ceremonies, suppress Lectures, silence ministers, promote the Book of Sports [and] advance Arminianism and Popery'.¹ In fact, some bishops did not support the innovations and leaned towards Calvinism, while even the Arminians on the bench were not uniform in their zeal and commitment.

This chapter looks at the record of Robert Wright, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, 1632-1643, whose sympathies lay with the Arminian group which came to prominence within the Church of England in the later 1620s. His churchmanship is revealed in his visitation articles of 1633, which included a section regulating preaching, and in the widespread implementation of the railing of communion tables throughout the diocese. However, Wright was less diligent than some of his Laudian allies would have liked. The chapter explores possible explanations for his apparent half-heartedness, and compares his episcopate with other, more energetic, contemporaries. It argues that he occupied a less thorough-going Arminian position than some of his peers and diocesan officials, but that under his leadership the see was broadly regulated according to the *mores* of contemporary Laudianism.

Robert Wright

Robert Wright was born in St. Albans in 1560. Graduating from Trinity College, Oxford, in 1580, he received his B.D. in 1592, and his D.D. in 1597. In

¹ W. Prynne, *Canterburies Doom* (London, 1646), p.353.

the early years of his ministry he collected a number of cures, was made a canon residentiary and treasurer at Wells and appointed a chaplain to Elizabeth.² He was also a royal chaplain to James, though Dudley Carleton was unimpressed and judged him the worst of the batch of Oxford men who were called to preach before the King in 1610.³ In 1613 Wright was appointed warden of the newly-founded Wadham College, but resigned three months later because the foundress, Dorothy Wadham, would not permit the holder of the office to be married. In 1622 James elevated him to the bishopric of Bristol, where he restored the city churches, and made his commitment to Arminianism plain to his ecclesiastical superiors.⁴ On Morton's removal to Durham in 1632, Wright was translated to Coventry and Lichfield, as a reward, according to Hugh Trevor-Roper, for providing the Bristol diocese with an episcopal palace by not renewing a lease.⁵ When he took the oath of homage in November, he was already seventy-two years old.

According to Anthony à Wood, Wright was 'much given up to the affairs of the world', in that 'he did in a short time gather up so much wealth from the church, as not only to purchase the rich manor of Newnham Courtney in Oxfordshire ... for the sum of £18,000 ... but lands also in other places'.⁶ Writing to John Cosin in 1634, John Hayward, prebendary of Lichfield, described the church and diocese there as 'Augias' stable', maintaining that the 'principall governors ... live upon the dung of this stable'.⁷ To what extent the Bishop was included in this slur is uncertain, but Wright was no stranger to charges of

² In 1589 (-1619), he was appointed rector of Woodford, Essex; 1589; rector of St. John the Evangelist, London; 1591, to the cure of St. Katherine, Coleman Street, London; 1596, to Brixton Deverell, Wiltshire and Bourton-on-the Water, Gloucestershire; 1601 to Hayes, Middlesex and 1604 to Sonning, Berkshire. *DNB*.

³ J.B.Nicholls, *The Progresses of King James the First* (London, 1828), vol. II, p.287.

Corresponding with Sir Thomas Edmondes, Carleton wrote: 'The court sermons have been well and exactly hitherto discharged, and our Oxford men have proved the most prominent; Dr. King, Field and Aiglionby to do the best; and Wright to do the worst'.

⁴ See below, pp. 191-192.

⁵ H.R.Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud* (London, 1962), pp.184-5.

⁶ Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis* (New York, 1967), vol.4, pp.800-802.

⁷ *The Correspondence of John Cosin* (Durham, 1868), vol.I, pp.217-19.

financial irregularity and mismanagement. In 1636, he failed to send his annual bishop's report to Laud. Writing to Charles, the Archbishop commented that 'whereas the Bishop was lately complained of to your majesty for making waste of the poor woods there remaining, he is not over-willing to give an account of that particular'. Like his predecessor, Overton, Wright was accused of selling timber from the episcopal estate for his own profit.⁸ He also had to deal with complaints from Robert Skinner, a protégé of Laud and a successor at Bristol, who complained to Laud that Wright had impoverished his see, 'carrying away to his new bishopric the perquisites which legitimately belonged to his successor'.⁹ Anxious to vindicate himself, Wright wrote to Laud in March 1637 'a true relation of things that I have done (for the benefit of posterity) where God blessed me with any means since I left University as my soule shall answer at the last day'. The letter was not a spiritual testimony, but a list of building construction and repairs with examples of financial improvements made by Wright during his entire ministry. His concern to restore and beautify churches under his charge appears to have been undertaken with Laudian zeal. At Sonning he 'got a new ile to bee built to the chancell and the church to be put into the best state of any in that country, and made at my own charge a faire windowe in the darke corner at my departure to Bristol'. At Hayes he ensured 'church and chancell to be better repaired and beautified then any church I then knew in that country'. He continued in the same way at Bristol, where he 'got all the churches in that city soe well repaired and beautified that I dare say noe Parish church in London exceeds them', procuring organs and 'meanes to maintaine the organist in 3 or 4 at least'. Since his translation, he had also made improvements to episcopal property

⁸ J.Bliss (ed.), *The Works of Archbishop Laud* (Oxford, 1853), vol.v, p.346; *DNB*; see also chapter 1.

⁹ Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud*, pp.347-8. Amongst the papers Wright had kept from the Bristol diocese was a survey of Cromhall, which was passed to Skinner, Laud acting as an intermediary. Skinner complained that the documentation failed to include a 'counterpart of a lease', which the Archbishop also wished to see. Wright replied, with asperity, 'the Bishop of Bristol's thanks for the survey of Cromhall is a new load of frivolous accusations'. He (Wright) was not a little comforted that ill-will had no worse to charge him with, and he declared that 'for the counterpart of Cromhall he found none, therefore he left none'. PRO, SP 16/386/2; 16/387/34.

at Lichfield. He concluded: 'These are truths *Coram Deo* and I write them not for ostentation but to affront malice...and now my good Lord if I that thus walked all my life should now in the upshott of my dayes bee a willfull waster I should think myselfe unworthy to live amongst men'.¹⁰

Wright's Churchmanship

Wright's letter to Laud was an endeavour to justify himself before the Archbishop; it also proclaimed his zeal to restore churches, one of the priorities of Laudianism. During his time in Bristol, he had shown that he was keen to obey the royal Instructions of 1629, which had sought to regulate preaching. He wrote to Samuel Harsnett (Archbishop of York) and Laud seeking advice about their implementation, in the process revealing his Arminian sympathies, and informed them that he would convert the Bristol Sunday lecture 'to more proffitable catechisinge'. Maintenance for the Bristol city lecturer was taken from an impropriation in the country, where, according to Wright, 'the vicars body and peoples soules are starved by it, and these wantons are little the better, so that I feare mee maintenans wee have not, but sacriledg'. Conducting ordinations, he had failed to secure the assistance of the dean and chapter in the laying on of hands, and had been forced to use 'singing men and such as sholde not approach so high', and he asked Harsnett and Laud how to deal with the capitular clergy on this issue. Wright awaited the King's '*fac Hoc*' or his correspondents' 'honoured judgments' in order that he might render his obedience to the King and perform due service which was 'most acceptable to God the God of order'.¹¹

Wright's Arminian concern for reverence and uniformity in worship was apparent in his primary visitation of the Dean and Chapter of Lichfield.¹² Compared with Morton, whose enquiries at Durham cathedral in 1637 emphasised

¹⁰ SP 16/351/38.

¹¹ SP 16/160/68.

¹² LJRO, B/V/3 ex Dean and Chapter. This is a copy of the original manuscript. It is dated 7 September, 1636, but this must be due to the clerk's error, as the document states that it records the Bishop's primary visitation.

the preservation of the fabric and the revenues of the community, Wright was more concerned with the 'decorous observance of divine worship'. The Bishop asked if the congregation stood and turned to the east, 'at all three creeds convertet towards the holy Table when they are sung or said?' Worshippers were also to turn to the 'blessed Table' at the doxology of every psalm.¹³ The Laudian veneration for the communion table is evidenced by Wright's article about the deportment of those that entered the chancel. 'Do all that enter the quire adore God with bodily worship as well as spiritual in their entrance into the quire and also *in transitu* from side to side- towards the Holy Table according to the statute'?¹⁴

Wright also made his enthusiasm for Arminianism evident in his support for Edmund Reeve (d.1660), whom he had encouraged to write *The Christian Divinity out of the Divine Service*, in 1631. Reeve's sacramentalism was later manifested in his *Communion Book Catechism* of 1636. Guided in his interpretation of the Bible by the *Book of Common Prayer* and *The Homilies*, Reeve held that 'absolute reprobation' was at odds with the Scriptures and the homily on falling from God. Arguing that Christ died for the sins of the whole world, he asserted that any infant dying after baptism was numbered among the elect. He also maintained that the words used at the administration of Holy Communion implied that all communicants were elect.¹⁵

Wright's Visitation Articles and the Regulation of Preaching

Despite his encouragement of Reeve, and his expressions of Laudian zeal, Wright's primary visitation articles of 1633 were (in comparison with the more

¹³ K. Fincham, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church, II*, (Woodbridge, 1998), pp.xv and xxiii; B/V/3, article 13: 'Is *gloria patri* repeated after every Psalm, the congregation standing and turning as aforesaid'.

¹⁴ B/V/3, article 17.

¹⁵ Reeve contended that if 'due heed be not taken' it was possible to fall from grace. He defended the Book of Sports as tending to a 'verie great encrease of godlinesse'. He was also joint-author, with Richard Shelford and others, of a work on the defence of altars. P.G.White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic* (Cambridge, 1992), pp.296-7; *DNB*.

extreme articles for Norwich, published by Overall in 1619, and those issued for Hereford by Matthew Wren in 1635) only moderately 'Laudian'. Perhaps they reveal both his concern for reform and a commitment to diocesan peace.¹⁶ Almost identical to the set he had published at Bristol in 1631, they were republished with slight modifications in 1636 and 1639. In 1633, under the heading 'Of divine service and administration of the sacraments', Wright asked 'whether doth your minister administer the said communion to any that doth not humbly kneele at the receivinge of the same, and what are the names of them that refuse to kneele at the receivinge thereof?'¹⁷ Within the same section he enquired if any parishioners only came to hear the sermon, rather than for the full service 'appointed by the booke of common prayer, making a schisme or division betweene the use of publike prayer and preaching?'¹⁸ Question 47 directed churchwardens to present the names of any that refused to have their children baptised or to receive communion from the hands of their minister because he was not a preacher.¹⁹ In the section entitled, 'Running after Schismaticall Preachers', and directed against 'gadders', Wright enquired 'whether hath any of your parishes of late followed after strange preachers, unlicensed, suspended, or schismaticall, from parish to parish?' The wardens were requested to present offenders and also to report the 'places to which they resorted'.²⁰

Wright's articles are moderate not only when contrasted with some other Arminian bishops, but also when compared with those of Abbot for Gloucester in 1612, which were the basis of Morton's Lichfield articles of 1620. Unlike Abbot and Morton, Wright did not stipulate the use of the ring in marriage.²¹ The

¹⁶ Fincham, *Visitation Articles*, vol. II, pp.56-72. For Wren see *ibid.*, pp.129-144. For Overall see K.Fincham (ed.), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, vol I (Woodbridge, 1994), pp.157-168.

¹⁷ Fincham, *Visitation Articles II*, p.57.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.59. See the similarity between this article and that of Bancroft in chapter 3, p.13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.61. Archbishop Abbot's articles for Gloucester contain a similar phrase. Item 3.9 asks: 'Is there any in your parish that refuse to have their children baptised, or themselves to receive the communion at the hands of your minister, taking exception against him, and what causes and exceptions doe they alledge..?' Wright's article more specifically targets Puritans. See Fincham, *Visitation Articles*, vol. I, p.105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.102, Art. 2.3, compared with vol II, p.67, Art.9.1.

comparison also reveals Wright's more eirenical attitude towards Catholics. His enquiry if local ministers seek to reclaim recusants by offering 'quiet and temperate conference' is not found in Abbot's more confrontational approach.²²

The articles of 1633 contained questions with regard to preaching, to which Wright added a number of the Royal Instructions of 1629. From these, he enquired whether the afternoon sermon had been turned into catechising, if the lecturer read according to the liturgy in his surplice and hood before lecturing, whether market town lecturers were orthodox and preached in their cloaks, and 'whether hath any, being not a noble man, or man qualified by law ... any private chaplain in his or her house, and what is the name of every such pretended chaplain?'²³

The difference of approach towards the preaching ministry taken by Wright and Morton is well illustrated by their reactions to the application made by the mayor and corporation of Coventry in 1632 for permission to choose a preacher to minister in the city twice a week. The petition straddled both episcopates. Morton wrote forcefully to Samuel Buggs, the incumbent of both St. Michael's and Holy Trinity, expressing his intention 'to put an end to these controversies', approving the petition and ordering Buggs to comply with the request.²⁴ His translation to Durham left the request unresolved, and Wright's handling of the situation was in marked contrast. Wright was far more conciliatory, telling Buggs that 'I hear very well of you and your proceedings, unto which I shall ever be a close friend', and looked forward to hearing his version of the proceedings at a private conference. In the meantime he exhorted Buggs, as an experienced spiritual physician, to send him, 'out of your observation, a short lecture on the body of Covent[ry] what are the parts affected,

²² *Ibid.*, Vol II, 4.6, p.64, compared with Vol I, 2.8, p.105.

²³ *Ibid.*, Vol II, p.69. The Royal Instructions of 1629 are not found in Wright's Articles for 1636 or 1639. In 1633 he seems to have been more anxious than Laud in his Metropolitan articles for Lincoln (1635) to ensure compliance with the Instructions. Laud only included articles 3 and 4. These asked whether the lecturer preached in his cloak and not his gown, and if lecturers, offered a benefice, were either unwilling or had refused to take it.

²⁴ See Chapter 2.

and what the affection of the parts, soe shall I ... better effect if needs be the cure'.²⁵ Clearly Wright was prepared to act on Buggs' version of the state of affairs, whereas Morton had favoured the corporation. This reveals their different priorities, the one zealous to promote painful preaching, the other more concerned about the dangers of clerical and lay non-conformity.

Wright's inclusion of a number of the Royal Instructions in his Primary Visitation Articles underlined his concern to ensure the greater regulation of preaching. One result from these articles was that seven clerics were presented in 1633 for not wearing a hood.²⁶ Early in his episcopate he suppressed lectures at "Ripon" (Repton), which he regarded as 'seditious', an unspecified number of monthly lectures, 'with a fast and a moderator (like that which they called prophesying in Queen Elizabeth's reign)', and a running lecture, so called because the lecturer went from village to village, at the end of the week informing his disciples of his itinerary for the next week so that they might follow him around.²⁷ The greater vigilance against non-conformists under the Laudians brought the end to Julines Herring's ministry as lecturer in Shrewsbury. Suspended by Bishop Morton after reports of his nonconformity from Peter Studley (the minister of St. Chad's) and others, Herring's supporters managed to have the suspension removed. Herring persisted in his nonconformity and the suspension was re-imposed. The pattern repeated itself on a number of occasions, and there is evidence that, even when suspended, Herring still managed to preach at the Drapers' Hall in the town. His dissent came to the attention of Charles I, and he was, upon the King's instructions, 'certified for a Nonconformist to the late Archbishop' (George Abbot). According to Wright, the preacher had 'paysned' (poisoned) the town, and Laud threatened to 'pickle up that Herring of Shrewsbury'. Believing his position there as no longer tenable, because 'all hope

²⁵ SP 16/229/122.

²⁶ B/V/1/53;54;56; Archdeaconries of Shropshire, Stafford and Coventry. See Wright's 1633 article 11.2, in Fincham, *Visitation Articles II*, p.69.

²⁷ Bliss (ed.), *Works of William Laud*, vol.v, p.320.

of regaining the liberty of his ministry in Shrewsbury was gone,' Herring moved with his family to Cheshire, thus avoiding the Metropolitan Visitation of 1635. The following year, he became co-pastor of the English church at Amsterdam.²⁸

The Book of Sports

Wright's episcopate was greatly influenced by directives and pressures from his lay and ecclesiastical superiors, to an extent not experienced in the diocese since the reign of Elizabeth. In 1633, Charles saw fit to reintroduce the Book of Sports. This prohibited bear-baiting as well as interludes, and bowls amongst the meaner sort of people, on Sundays and Holy Days, but archery, dancing, rush-bearing, leaping, may-games and Whitsun ales were now permitted activities after Evening Prayer.²⁹ Laud gave instructions to proceed against ministers who did not read the Declaration publicly, and bishops directed churchwardens to certify on oath if it had been 'read and published' in their churches by their minister.³⁰

Wright was not a zealous sabbatarian. John Hieron claimed he had preached at Ashbourne that, where the need arose, he was prepared to allow some Sunday trading. 'Suppose a serving man receives his wages so late on the Sunday night that before he can get home, the shops are shut ... and no meat then to be bought; shall not the poor man therefore have a chop of meat to his dinner the next day?'³¹ The Bishop seems to have been reluctant to discipline clergy whose only apparent fault was a failure to publish the Declaration. It appears that only those ministers who were already known as non-conformists and also refused to read the Book of Sports were suspended. Benet of Uffington and Simeon Ashe were deprived, but only after they had left the diocese, Benet for Lancashire and Ashe

²⁸ DNB; Samuel Clarke, *The Lives of 32 English Divines* (London, 1677), p.162, see margin of Wing microfilmed edition; SP 16/387/20. He died in 1644.

²⁹ J. Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church* (Oxford, 1992), p.200.

³⁰ John Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State* (London, 1680) vol.ii, p.459.

³¹ R.Porter, *The Life of Mr. John Hieron* (London, 1691), p.133. Presumably Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, started and terminated at sundown.

for Wroxhall (a peculiar) and then, temporarily, to the Suffolk home of Lord Brooke.³²

Churchwardens' accounts yield evidence of some parishes which paid the six pence the Book cost. At Pattingham they bought 'a booke of toleration for sport' while at Checkley they paid the required amount 'for the book of recreacons to the pariter'. At Uffington they referred to it as 'a booke of the kinges pleasure and pastime', and at St. Julian's, Shrewsbury, John Lane was paid 'for the book which is set forth by His Ma(jest)ie for Libertie'. At Shawbury (Shropshire) the entry described the book as a 'booke of Declaration concerning his Ma (jest)ies pleasure'.³³ Not all churchwardens' records have an entry for the book. It is absent from a greater number of accounts, the majority of which do record alterations to communion tables. It would appear that obedience to the Declaration of Sports was less widespread than the requirement to rail the 'altars'. However, as Julian Davies maintains, 'it is impossible to estimate the total number of the clergy who read or refused to read the book, or the number of those parishes where the book was never published'.³⁴

The Beauty of Holiness

Following on the heels of the re-introduced Book of Sports, the Metropolitan Order of 1634 required the positioning of communion tables at the east end of the chancel in all parish churches, and the construction of rails around these tables, at which congregations were reverently to kneel when receiving the sacrament. Wright's later visitation articles do not enforce the Order, but it

³² Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, p.193. At the Metropolitan Visitation in 1635, Sir Nathaniel Brent, the vicar-general, only took action against Pegges, the curate of Weeford. He referred him to Charles Twysden, the diocesan chancellor, and suspended him 'in case he read not the declaration of Sports'. SP 16/293/128.

³³ SRO, D/3451/2/2; D113/A/PC/1; W.G.D. Fletcher (ed.), 'The Churchwardens' Accounts of Uffington, 1627-1693', *TSAS*, 2nd. Series, xii (1900), p.358; SH.R.O., 2711/Ch/1; P241/B/1/1/1. The entries are descriptive, and with the possible exceptions of the entries for St. Julian's and Uffington, give no indications as to the approval or disapproval of the wardens regarding the Book. This was not always the case. One Puritan minister referred pejoratively to the publication as the 'Book of Sporting'.

³⁴ Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, p.197.

appears that both the Bishop and at least one of his archdeacons used their authority to ensure that it was complied with. According to Fincham, the earliest example of the command that communion tables should be both placed at the east end and railed is found in the visitation articles of Samuel Clerke, the Archdeacon of Derby, in 1630. He enquired: 'Have you in your church or chappelle ... a communion table set on a frame, with a comely carpet, and is your communion table set at the east end of the chancel, and cancelled in from prophane use..?'³⁵

With regard to Wright's view of the Order, a popular view has maintained that his attitude was one of lackadaisical uninterest.³⁶ Julian Davies contests this. He claims that although Wright did not enforce the altar-wise position of the table, nor the instruction to receive at the rail, he nevertheless required that the table be placed at the east end and fenced. Davies states that in 1634 and 1636 Wright held courts of audience for churchwardens within his four archdeaconries to receive his instructions regarding the matter. Certificates of compliance were required at the quarterly courts.³⁷ Evidence of official enforcement of the table position can be found in the Bradley-by-Stafford churchwardens' accounts for 1634. At the visitation in October they were charged one shilling 'for the want of a *septin* [sic] about the table'. They later paid two pounds and six shillings to Thomas Allen to carry out the necessary work.³⁸ In 1636, at Croxall in Derbyshire, in a catalogue of offences, Christopher Smith was presented because the communion table was not railed in.³⁹

There is plentiful evidence for the effectiveness of diocesan policy with regard to the railing of altars. The churchwardens' accounts for St. Mary's

³⁵ *Articles given by Doctour Clerke, Archdeacon of Derby, and delivered to the churchwardens...at his visitation there holden in the yeare of our Lord God 1630.*

³⁶ C.Cross, *Church and People: 1450-1660* (London 1976), pp.178-9; Trevor-Roper, *Archbishop Laud*, p.174.

³⁷ Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, pp 218 and 234. Davies also claims that in 1636, 'Wright supplemented their activity by calling for certificates in his own triennial visitation'. There is no evidence of this in the visitational articles published by Fincham. See *Visitation Articles Vol II*, pp.70-72.

³⁸ SRO, D9/A/PC/1/43.

³⁹ LJRO, B/V/1/59, p.6.

Stafford record that on 20th February 1635, £4 6s. 6d was paid for ‘timber, nayles, carriage of timber and workmanshapp for the frame of the communion table’.⁴⁰ In 1634, at Pattingham, the joyner was paid for his preparatory inspection before beginning construction, when ‘he came to looke on the worke about the communion table’.⁴¹ In the same year, railing was undertaken at Biddulph and Harbury.⁴² At Checkley, the frame at the nearby church of Kingsley was inspected before the parish commenced work on its rail.⁴³ At Uffington (Shropshire) twenty-two persons contributed a total of fifty-five shillings and seven pence ‘for the paynting of the church and makinge a Rayle and for a new Cover for the pulpit’, and at Youlgreave (Derbyshire) the churchwardens paid over two pounds and ten shillings for ‘Rails envrioning the Communion rails’ (sic).⁴⁴ During the ministry of Henry Carpenter, the successor of Samuel Buggs at Holy Trinity, Coventry, the communion table was railed and decorated with mats; it was raised during the incumbency of his successor, Joseph Brown. Even the peculiar of St. Mary’s Shrewsbury, which was noted for its ‘inconformitie’, had provided gates to its table by 1637. There is some evidence that Brent also enforced the Metropolitan Order. Having heard that the communion table at Bridgnorth was placed ‘in the middle of the body of the church’, he ordered that it be ‘set in the chancel decently as Mr. Chancellor ... shall see fit’.⁴⁵

Samuel Clerke, the Arminian archdeacon of Derby, repeatedly pressed railing in his visitation articles. The 1636 returns for the archdeaconry recorded twelve parishes which had failed to comply.⁴⁶ At Alfreton, the vicar, Thomas Brooke, personally hindered the workmen that the churchwardens had hired to

⁴⁰ William Salt Library, WS400, transcript of churchwardens accounts of St. Mary’s, Stafford.

⁴¹ SRO, D/3451/2/2, f.82a.

⁴² SRO, D/3539/2/1; D 1528/4/1.

⁴³ SRO, D/113/A/PC/1.

⁴⁴ TSAS, ‘Uffington’, pp.358-9; J.C.Cox, *The Churches of Derbyshire* (Chesterfield, 1877), vol. ii, p.338.

⁴⁵ SP 16/287/2.

⁴⁶ LJRO, B/V/1/59. The parishes were Croxall, Chaddesdon, Newton Scone, Spondon (the work was not completed at the time of the visitation), Smaley, Swarkeston (where the communion table was neither railed ‘nor right placed’), Atlow, Hognaston, Osmaston-near-Ashbourne, Blackwell, Hathersage and Alfreton.

construct the rail, declaring that 'neither the workmen nor the churchwardens should do it, for the church was his', although this does appear to be an isolated case.⁴⁷ The 1636 presentments must have been effective for by 1639 the churchwardens of Belper were the only ones presented for the lack of a rail.⁴⁸

Some churches seem to have had rails before the metropolitan order was introduced. The churchwardens' accounts for St. Julian's, Shrewsbury, for 1637-1638 itemise the money paid to Thomas Peacocke for work on the communion table and rail, but as the total sum amounted to only five shillings and four pence this must have been a repair job.⁴⁹ At Eccleshall, the site of the Bishop's palace, and a peculiar of Wright's, the churchwardens' accounts (dating from 1631) give no indication that a rail was constructed in this period, thus implying that the table had been 'fenced' some time before this. Furthermore, the accounts contain a number of entries which indicate that the altar hangings in the parish church were both rich and splendid, signifying the respect with which the altar was regarded as the focal point of worship, and the expense to which the wardens were prepared to go in the pursuit of the 'beauty of holiness'.⁵⁰ At the least, the furnishings obviously met with Wright's approval.

The concept of 'the beauty of holiness' consisted of a veneration of the splendour and beauty of consecrated objects and buildings and the reverent deportment of worshippers in church. The 'beautifying' of church buildings and furniture was a feature of the 1630s which the hierarchy encouraged. In 1636, for instance, in response to Brent's criticism, improvements were made in Lichfield cathedral, so that it was 'very beautifully set out with hangings of arras behind the altar, the communion-table handsomely railed in; and the table itself set out in the

⁴⁷ Brooke was so piqued that despite the first Sunday of the year being set aside for the celebration of holy communion, he absented himself and had the church doors locked 'so that there was not any co[m]mun[i]on at all nor noe divine service that day in the fore-noone'. *Ibid.*, p.71.

⁴⁸ B/V/1/64.

⁴⁹ SHRO, 2711/Ch/1

⁵⁰ WSL, 236/27. The entries for 1637 include: 'Item paid for foure yards and three quarters of crimson £2..5s..2d.; paid for the Communion cupp and cover £6..16s..6d.; 3 yards and quarter of redd cloth for the com-munion Table £1..16s..9d., 12 ounces and halfe of crimson silke £1..5s; paid for making fringe of it 2s..10d; paid more for silke & tassells and makeinge 6s'.

best manner, and the bishop's seat fairly built'.⁵¹ At Stockton, Warwickshire, the rector reported there were 'somethings for decencie and ornaments of our church wantinge', while in the Derbyshire parish of Barlow, Sir John Harpur, the impropiator, was presented because the church was 'not beautified'.⁵² A number of presentments from the Derby *comperta* of 1636 were due to the want of a covering for the communion table. Godfrey Beard, the Puritan churchwarden of Osmaston was presented with his fellow warden, John Twigge, because a 'carpett of linnen and woollen for the co[mmun]ion was lacking. Similar presentments were made at Hathersage, Elton, Mellor, and in the 1639 presentments, at Twyford. Twigge's son was reported in the same year as his father for writing upon the communion table.⁵³

The clergy were expected to set an example of reverent and faithful adherence to the liturgy and rubric of the Prayer Book. At Baddesley Clinton, in 1635, in response to Brent's visitation, the minister was reported for not reading prayers on Wednesdays, Fridays or 'holie daye eves nor wereth the surplisse but promiseth to do it'. In 1636, at Stivichall, the minister, Mr. Perkins, was presented for not preaching from the pulpit and for 'preaching in his surplesse not according to the booke of articles'.⁵⁴ At Bonningale, Shropshire, it was reported in 1639 that Vincent, the incumbent, had administered the communion to a member of his congregation who had remained seated. He compounded his offence by arriving at church on Easter Day in an 'unreverent manner'. While the King's proclamation was being read, he went up to the communion table with his hat on, prepared the elements, pouring out the wine and drinking it and then after the sermon delivered the sacrament to the congregation.⁵⁵

⁵¹ T.Birch (ed.), *The Court and Times of Charles I* (1848).

⁵² B/V/1/56, p.39; /59, p.3.

⁵³ B/V/1/59, pp.60,78; /64.

⁵⁴ B/V/1/56, p.10; B/V/1/58, p.31.

⁵⁵ B/V/1/65.

With regard to lay discipline, the church courts' offensive against gadding was pursued more forcefully than it had been under Morton.⁵⁶ Similarly, the 1630s brought greater emphases on outward reverence and uniformity in worship. A growing number of Puritans were presented for non-conformity, over such matters as failing to bow at the name of Jesus, and failing to stand, according to liturgical prescription, at the requisite moments of worship.⁵⁷ These increases may reveal a growing intransigence on the part of some parishioners. In the main, however, it is likely that churchwardens who had earlier ignored such offences now felt obliged to report them. The shift in diocesan policy had a direct impact at parish level, and served to alienate many who regarded themselves as generally law-abiding.

The Metropolitan Visitation

In 1633, Wright complained to Laud that the peculiars in his diocese were much out of order. The Archbishop commented, 'and I easily believe it'. Knowing very little of the incumbents, Laud foresaw that the remedy would be difficult, but promised to be better informed personally about the situation.⁵⁸ In April 1635, a month before Sir Nathaniel Brent began his metropolitan visitation of the see, Brent was sent a catalogue of all the peculiar jurisdictions and prebends belonging to the Dean and chapter of Lichfield.⁵⁹ Another list of peculiars, in the main not belonging to the Lichfield hierarchy, was sent to Brent at the same time, and included comments by Wright, indicating something of his views.⁶⁰ St. Mary's, Shrewsbury, 'hath ever bene a Receptacle for Excommunicated persons to protect themselves from further punishment by their ordinaries', while Bridgnorth 'hath bene alwayes a harbinger of nonconformists'. Peculiars could provide a similar refuge for dissenting clergy. Wright complained that one

⁵⁶ See chapter 3, pp.130-131.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.132-134.

⁵⁸ Bliss, *Works of Laud*, vol v, p.320

⁵⁹ SP 16/387/19.

⁶⁰ SP 16/387/20.

Guilpin, who had been certified as a nonconformist by Archbishop Abbot, had since 'shrouded himself' in the peculiar of Knowle. Wright accused ministers in peculiars of a variety of offences, such as not wearing the surplice and failing to read the liturgy. He reported Dr. Wetton, of St. Mary's, Shrewsbury and William Madstar of Bridgnorth for failing to read the Book of Sports. He had heard that at Bridgnorth the reader or curate had taken the service on a Sunday morning dressed in his surplice, but had not worn it for evening prayer, when he had omitted both the litany and the catechism. The same day communion had been celebrated, 'administered without surplisse, the minister goinge from pew to pew so that nobody can discern whether the Communicants doe sitt or kneele: The Communion table standeth in the middle of the body of the Church although there bee a faire Chancell: and it is sayd that conventicles are frequent there'.⁶¹

Brent visited the Cathedral and the four archdeaconries of the diocese in the latter half of May, 1635. His main preoccupations were the condition of the building and fabric of the churches, clerical and lay nonconformity, and the moral condition of the clergy. His only comment about Catholics was made in the Lichfield area, where he found 'there are a great many papists in these parts'.⁶²

Brent's concern for the upkeep, beauty and correct use of consecrated buildings is very apparent. In 1634, three visitors to Lichfield cathedral commented that there was 'a fayre Communion Cloth of Cloth of Gold for the High Altar'.⁶³ Brent was less impressed, finding that the area 'where the communion table standeth, is undecent in many respects'. There were too many seats in the building, and he was also unhappy with the state of the Cathedral close. He reported that in the churches at Shrewsbury, where there were 'many things out of order, especially about the communion table'.⁶⁴ The chancel at

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² SP 16/293/128

⁶³ L.G.Wickham Legg (ed.), *A Relation of A Short Survey of 26 Counties observed in a seven week Journey begun on August 11th., 1634. By a Captain, a lieutenant and an Ancient* (London, 1904), p.57.

⁶⁴ SP 16/387/128.

Uttoxeter (Staffordshire) was covered with verses in commendation of various preachers who had ministered there, written over the years by a 'Mr Archbold', an elderly parishioner. Much to the author's chagrin, Brent ordered them to be removed and replaced by biblical texts. In the area around Stafford, he found many churches and churchyards 'kept very undecently'. In his report on the peculiars, Wright had mentioned a chapel at Haslor, which because of local depopulation had been turned into a barn to store hay, furze or cattle.⁶⁵ Brent discovered a number of other chapels profanely used for 'barns or worse', an abuse of such longstanding that he was uncertain whom to hold responsible. Elsewhere in the diocese, church dilapidations were less apparent. He reported that the two of the city churches of Coventry were beautiful and well-kept 'except some few decays in one of them, which I have ordered to be amended'. One possessed a 'fair pair of organs' and Brent hoped that another 'pair of organs' would be set up in All Hallows, Derby.⁶⁶

Brent was equally determined to combat clerical nonconformity. When visiting Lichfield, he suspended Lee of Wolverhampton, and also a young curate of Dr. Burgis, who lacked a canonical habit and insisted on being called 'assistant' rather than 'curate'. Wright had informed Brent that at Weeford (Staffordshire), the owner of the advowson, Brandreth, 'himself being very precise', had installed a Mr. Pegge to the cure, 'who is not conformable'. Brent suspended him *ex nunc prout ex tunc* if he did not read the Declaration of Sports on the following Sunday week. At Derby, Charles Broxholme, the curate at Buxton (of whom Wright had also informed Brent) was suspended for 'absence and inconformity', while at Coventry he suspended the Puritan minister of Honiley, Smith.⁶⁷

Brent complained, nonetheless, that much of Wright's information was unreliable. Visiting Shrewsbury he found 'the notes of the bishop of the diocese

⁶⁵ SP 16/387/20.

⁶⁶ SP 16/293/128

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

were most of them mistaken'.⁶⁸ Wright had informed him that Bedford, the curate of St. Mary's, 'never or seldome weareth the Surplisse and (as I heare) is otherwise unconformed'.⁶⁹ Wright had suspended him, but Bedford had appealed and Brent, unable to find any witnesses against him, 'let him pass with an admonition'. Wright had also reported that Wetton, the minister of St. Mary's, 'only preacheth and by that means never expresseth any conformity'. Brent commented, 'this view is mistaken'. Another claim, that Uppington belonged 'to Sir Richard Newport and [was] always noted for inconformitie', was rebutted personally by Newport, who, Brent found, was 'a very discreet and a conformable gentleman, and a great friend to conformable ministers'. Despite Wright's catalogue of complaints about Bridgnorth, Brent could find nothing to prove against Madstar, save that he had married a couple before the canonical hour, for which he suspended him. (The Vicar-General resorted to guile in his dealings with Madstar, making him believe he would call him before High Commission).⁷⁰ Wright's notes do not suggest any difference of principle between him and Brent. It appears that Wright was simply happy to supply him with a considerable amount of information based on hearsay and rumour.⁷¹ Where Brent, zealous but also scrupulous, found firm evidence of wrong-doing, he was more than prepared to suspend for nonconformity; where the evidence was lacking, and Wright's accusations unsubstantiated, he was constrained from taking precipitate measures.

Dame Eleanor Davies and the Lichfield Altar

One of the strangest episodes during Wright's episcopate was the attack on the Cathedral altar by the eccentric prophetess, Lady Eleanor Davies, and the Bishop's subsequent failure to report the matter to Laud and the central

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ SP 16/387/20.

⁷⁰ Brent also failed to substantiate Wright's charges against Rowlandson of Bakewell, Burton of Stafford and Newton of Cannock. *Ibid.*

⁷¹ For instance, he uses the expressions, 'as they say', 'as I heare', 'I understand', and 'yet I feare some irregularitie there'.

authorities. Dame Eleanor (1590-1652) had married Sir John Davies, James's attorney-general for Ireland, in 1609. In 1625, after a mystical experience at her home in Berkshire, in which she believed the prophet Daniel had spoken to her, Dame Eleanor embarked on a prophetic mission. Unsuccessful in her attempts to gain court recognition as a prophetess, she provoked the opposition of the hierarchy by petitioning against the appointment of Laud as Archbishop. The Crown summoned her before the High Commission. Laud burnt her books, and, in 1633, she was imprisoned in the Gatehouse, Westminster, where she remained for two and a half years.⁷²

In 1636, shortly after her release, Dame Eleanor took lodgings at the Angel Inn at Lichfield and had daily conference with two local disciples, Marie Noble, the wife of the town clerk, and Susan Walker, the wife of a cleric. Both women were discontented with the arrangements at the cathedral, Noble having attacked Margaret Twysden, the chancellor's wife, in the cathedral because of a pew dispute, and Walker resenting the new altar hangings. Lady Eleanor also objected to the altar innovations of the period, although her motives for her subsequent acts are less clear.⁷³ Davies was taken to the cathedral every day, except Sundays. At first the women sat and kneeled in the seats reserved for gentlewomen, but later moved to ones especially appointed for the wives of the cathedral hierarchy. Removing from the 'Angel' to stay with Walker, Davies wrote *The Appeal to the Throne*, sending a copy to Wright. She caused great scandal by sitting on the bishop's throne and declaring herself primate and metropolitan. It was later

⁷² E.S.Cope (ed.), *Prophetic Writings of Lady Eleanor Davies* (New York, 1992), pp.xi-xvii.

⁷³ In her pamphlet *The Restitution of Prophecy: that Buried Talent to be Revived* (1651) she referred to the changes to the communion table at Lichfield, and to her dislike of them. She describes the innovations, in her opaque manner, as, 'Horrible to behold, eclipsed light, covered the *Ten Commandments*, under the cover of an *Altar Hanging*, wanting no *nailing* neither: of coarse wollen, Purple etc, fastened down, less the precious tables an eye sore'. Cope, *Prophetic Writings of Lady Eleanor Davies*, pp. 361-362. Lady Davies's biblical hermeneutic was, it appears, peculiar to herself. E.S.Cope, *Handmaid of the Holy Spirit* (New York, 1992), p.61. Davies had been involved in a lengthy legal battle after the death of her first husband, Sir John Davies, the outcome of which she found unsatisfactory; her appearance and actions in Lichfield may have been in part motivated by the fact that Bishop Wright had been appointed as executor of the will. *DNB*.

alleged that Noble and Walker came ‘purposlie to see her sitt on the said throne and did both or one of them approve thereof’.⁷⁴ On another occasion, Davies entered the cathedral at the end of morning prayer and, as the choir were leaving the chancel, produced a ‘pott of water, tarr and other filthee things’ and defiled the altar hangings, telling some of the departing choir members that she had ‘sprinkled holie water uppon the same ag[ains]t their co[mmun]ion the next daye’.⁷⁵

Although Davies appears to have been mentally unbalanced, she and her supporters clearly disliked the Laudian innovations. Laud already had good reason to dislike Davies- she had referred to him as the Beast from the Bottomless Pit- and his antipathy was compounded by her desecration of the Lichfield altar. For Laud this was a particularly blasphemous act, for he viewed the altar as ‘the greatest place of God’s residence on earth. I say the greatest, yea greater than the pulpit, for there ’tis *Hoc est corpus meum*, “This is my body”, but in the pulpit ’tis at most but *Hoc est verbum meum*, “This is My word”’.⁷⁶ In December 1636 the Privy Council ordered that Davies be brought to London and committed to Bedlam, sending a sergeant-at-arms to collect her and bring her to the hospital.⁷⁷

1636 was the third year Wright failed to submit his annual diocesan account to Laud, whose duty it was to pass the report to the King. Laud complained to Charles that he was therefore unable to give a detailed record of the ‘gross abuse committed in the cathedral church’ by Lady Davies. He had heard, however, that she had ‘sprinkled the altar hangings and bishop’s throne with dirty water’, and entreated the King that ‘she may have no more power to commit such horrible profanation’.⁷⁸ Wright’s Arminian churchmanship and the efficiency with which communion tables were railed within the diocese, raise the question why he did not seek to ingratiate himself further with the Archbishop by providing

⁷⁴ SP 16/380/94.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Cope, *Handmaid of the Holy Spirit*, p.64; Laud, *Works*, vol.iv, p.57.

⁷⁷ Cope, *Handmaid of the Holy Spirit*, pp.86,92.

⁷⁸ Laud, *Works*, vol v, pp.331,336,346.

a suitably lurid account of the affair, particularly as he had already supplied Brent with a list of nonconforming peculiars, and sent Laud a copy of Humphrey Fenn's puritan will in 1633.⁷⁹ Wright later pleaded that it was 'but a slip of forgetfulness'. (Charles retorted that Wright had slipped in the same way before and that he 'did not like that his commands should be so slightly regarded as to be so easily forgotten'.⁸⁰ Wright replied that he would 'put the King's directive in the best storehouse age has left him, and endeavour to keep time with better memories').⁸¹ Laud's ascribed Wright's failure to send a report in 1636 to his unwillingness to answer an earlier allegation that he had wasted the woods on the episcopal estates.⁸² This may well be the case. If so, Wright was prepared to pass in silence over Dame Eleanor's blasphemous actions rather than face up to the accusations about his own episcopal conduct.

Wright's Moderation

Wright's Arminianism was less thorough-going (as well as less zealous) than that of some other bishops and some of his own diocesan officials.⁸³ Although his articles of 1633 insisted that Sunday afternoon lectures should be turned into catechising, he did not forbid preaching on catechetical subjects, as Peter Studley's catechetical sermon, preached during Wright's 1633 visitation to the archdeaconry of Salop, testifies.⁸⁴ Wright was not a strict sabbatarian, and did not even adhere rigidly to the restrictions placed on sabbath day activities by the Book of Sports. John Hieron reports that he permitted bear baiting to take place on Sundays at Eccleshall.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ See pp.203-204; SP 16/260/83.

⁸⁰ Bliss, *Laud's Works*, vol vii, p.413; SP 16/386/2.

⁸¹ SP 16/387/34.

⁸² See p.191. In 1647 (Wright had died in 1643) it was stated that in two years the Bishop had felled and sold timber at Brewood (Staffordshire) worth over £130. SRO 547/M/1/173.

⁸³ See comments on his Visitation Articles, pp.197-199, and chapter 7.

⁸⁴ P. Studley, *The Looking Glasse of Schisme* (1635), p.190.

⁸⁵ Porter, *Life of John Hieron*, p.133. See also above p.197.

Neither did the Bishop invariably give Arminians the benefit of the doubt. Peter Studley, the anti-Puritan vicar of St. Chad's, Shrewsbury, saw himself as an ally of the Bishop. In 1635 he accused a visiting preacher, Samuel Fisher, curate of Withington, Cheshire, of factiously taking the same text that Wright had preached on, the week before, in Shrewsbury. Wright simply ordered Fisher to preach again in the town, 'and explaine himselfe'. This he did to the Bishop's satisfaction, and Wright later commended him to the Bishop of St. Asaph. Despite Studley's vilification of Fisher in print as a 'false traducer' and schismatic, Wright continued to exonerate him.⁸⁶

Wright's pragmatic approach to diocesan problems is well illustrated by his decision with regard to the altar table at St. Michael's Coventry. In 1636, Twysden, the diocesan Chancellor, had ordered that the communion tables in the city churches of St. Michael's and Holy Trinity be moved to the east end of the chancels, and 'handsomely raised by three steps' in order that 'the celebration of the sacrament might be conspicuous to all the church'. His injunction was in response to an order from Charles who had recently visited the city and ordered that the table should remain in a fixed position at the east-end.⁸⁷ Despite this, and for the sake of convenience because the church was large, Wright gave permission to the mayor and corporation to remove the table into the body of the church during the administration of communion. Informed of the Bishop's authorisation, Edward Latham, a proctor at Lichfield (who with Archdeacon Jeffrey of Salop and Twysden had been involved in a recent altercation with the Bishop and, like them, was zealous to implement altar reform) passed the information on to Sir John Lambe. Laud dismissed the appeal as instigated by malice.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ R. More, *A True Relation of the Murders Committed in the Parish of Clunne in the County of Stafford by Enoch ap Evans* (London, 1641), pp.116-119; P. Lake, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and a Shropshire Axe-Murderer', *Midland History*, xv (1990), pp.37-64.

⁸⁷ SP 16/350/326; 16/351/18; 16/351/38; Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, pp.234-35.

⁸⁸ Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, p.90.

Wright's Archdeacons

Margaret Stieg has stated that Bishop Piers of Bath and Wells had 'the fullest co-operation that could be expected from ... his surrogates'.⁸⁹ Like Bishop Neile, he had gathered around him a trustworthy group of lieutenants. Such was not Wright's case. His leading church officers were not a close-knit team, neither did they respond enthusiastically to all his directives. Of his four archdeacons, only Martin Tinley of Stafford was appointed by Wright himself in 1636, succeeding John Fultnetby, who had held office since 1614, and he remains a somewhat shadowy figure.⁹⁰ Ralph Brownrigg (1592-1659) was a protégé of Morton, who made him prebendary of Tachbroke in 1629 and archdeacon of Coventry in 1631. 'A learned man and no Arminian', of similar churchmanship to his patron and bishops Usher and Hall, he later became bishop of Exeter.⁹¹ During his time as Archdeacon, his duties outside the diocese multiplied. In 1635, the fellows of St. Catherine's Hall, Cambridge, appointed him to succeed Richard Sibbes as master, and he was vice-chancellor of the University in 1637-38.⁹² Such responsibilities would have kept him from residing in the diocese. A Calvinist conformist, he, with Daniel Featley and Richard Holdsworth, were described by Archbishop Harsnett as 'conformable Puritans'. Laud often referred non-conformists to them, to reduce them to conformity. With his obligations elsewhere, it is uncertain whether he spent much time on the affairs of the archdeaconry, and O'Day has questioned whether he demonstrated much personal interest or capacity as archdeacon of Coventry.⁹³

Bishop Morton had appointed Samuel Clerke to the archdeaconry of Derby in 1623. A zealous Arminian reformer, Clerke observed the 1629 Instructions to

⁸⁹ M. Stieg, *Laud's Laboratory* (East Brunswick, 1982), p.284.

⁹⁰ Tinley, an Oxford B.A., became vicar of Walden, Herts, in 1642. He was later sequestered from his living, replaced by James Baker. J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses, 1500-1714* (Oxford, 1892), vol. iv, p.1489; Matthews, *Walker Revised* (Oxford, 1988).

⁹¹ J. Gauden, preface in R. Brownrigg, *Forty Sermons of the Rt. Rev ... Ralph Brownrigg* (London, 1661); *DNB*; SP 16/298/10.

⁹² *DNB*.

⁹³ Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, p.72; R. O'Day, *The English Clergy* (Leicester, 1979), p.155.

the letter, and was an enthusiastic enforcer of the railing of altars. Like Brownrigg, however, he had extra-diocesan responsibilities, which ensured that much of his time and efforts were taken up elsewhere. He was surrogate of the ecclesiastical court at Northampton. Bishop Dee of Peterborough commissioned him, with Robert Sibthorpe, to ensure that every parish had a railed altar, at which each minister was to administer the communion to kneeling parishioners, a task he pursued with great enthusiasm.⁹⁴

William Jeffrey, Archdeacon of Salop (1628-1642), was far more active within the diocese. Also appointed by Morton, Jeffrey was or became an enthusiastic Arminian innovator. Within his archdeaconry (and also Stafford), the courts imposed fines for failure to place communion tables in the east-end position and rail them. Jeffrey was more doctrinaire than Wright, and there is evidence of a lack of respect, and some animosity, between him (and other diocesan officials) and the Bishop.⁹⁵

Wright was also involved in contentions with the dean and chapter at Lichfield. In 1637, unaware of Overton's statutes, he attempted to impose some new ones on the cathedral, informing Laud that those in use had not been renewed since 1526, and were 'very capable of reformation'. The attempt met with opposition from the dean, Samuel Fell (1637-38), who complained to Laud that Wright's additions were prejudicial to the cathedral and might lead to confusion. Despite Wright's inclusion of material from the recent Canterbury statutes, the Archbishop sided with Fell, forbidding Wright to impose them until the whole body of Lichfield statutes had been revised by an independent royal commission.⁹⁶

Conclusions

What were some of the main characteristics of Robert Wright's episcopate? A skilful participant in ecclesiastical politics, he sought to make a

⁹⁴ See, for example SP 16/302/16 iii; 16/311/33; 16/370/51.

⁹⁵ See above, p.210 and chapter 7.

⁹⁶ Bliss, *Works of Laud*, vol.vii, p.415; *VCH, Staffs*, vol.iii, pp.171-2.

good impression on those above him. He sometimes blew with the prevailing theological wind, as his correspondence with Harsnett and Laud about the Royal Instructions, his catalogue of building activities sent to Laud, his information to Brent about peculiars, and his encouragement of Reeve all testify. On some occasions, when he met local opposition, his authority was bolstered by recourse to the power invested in his superiors. This can be observed, for example, in the case of the vacant curacy of St. Chad's, Shrewsbury, a royal peculiar, in 1638. Wright's officials had recommended that George Lawson, curate of Mayneston (Hereford), should be appointed, but one of the town bailiffs selected Richard Poole, who took the living by 'popular and tumultuarie' election. No academic, Poole's dismal Greek had debarred him from becoming a master at Shrewsbury School, but being a cleric 'of the school of Perkins and Dr. Downham' he had received the support of a number of influential Puritan townsmen. The Bishop refused to grant Poole admission to the church, and suspended him. Wright also turned to Laud, who not only recommended Lawson for the position, but also secured the King's direct intervention. Charles wrote to the officials of the town, expressing his displeasure and charging them with usurping both his authority and that of the Ordinary. He sent letters of *mandamus* to the parties involved, and Lawson duly took the curacy. The King threatened to proceed against the congregation if they showed any further dissatisfaction.⁹⁷ Charles' reaction was in no way remarkable, as the town had trespassed on the royal prerogative and the rights of Bishop Wright. He had merely replaced a Puritan minister, chosen by popular election with a conformable curate on the advice of his Archbishop who had, in turn, upheld the choice of the Ordinary.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ SP 16/375/55; 16/386/89; Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, p.53.

⁹⁸ There is evidence that, despite Charles' threatenings, some parishioners expressed their disapproval by absenting themselves from worship. In 1639 the churchwardens reported: 'Wee say the p[ar]ish is lardge and we know not the parishioners: but some come hither'. Despite official sanction, Lawson was not a regular catechiser: 'We have no catechizinge constantly every Sondag'. B/V/1/65.

The Bishop was not as doctrinaire an Arminian as he sought to appear to his superiors. Instances such as his attitude to the Sabbath, his dealings with Samuel Fisher, the preacher, and his approach to the problem of the communion table at St. Michael's, Coventry, reveal a pragmatism and sensitivity which frustrated some of his more zealous subordinates. Nor were they alone in their frustration. Wright imperfectly reflected the agenda of the King and Archbishop Laud, and both expressed their dissatisfaction at the Bishop's repeated failure to supply annual diocesan reports in the mid 1630s. Laud attributed Wright's failure to report the desecration of the Lichfield altar to the Bishop's unwillingness to reply to a previous accusation of mismanagement, a serious charge indicating that the Archbishop thought Wright prepared to compromise his episcopal duties for the sake of his own well-being. There may well have been elements of indifference, negligence and worldliness in the Bishop's character, but these attributes alone give a very inadequate impression of his episcopate. Fincham has commented that the theological differences between Calvinist and Arminian bishops had a practical counterpart in rival forms of churchmanship, the latter emphasising the disciplinarian concerns of office.⁹⁹ Arminians tended to be custodians of order, and there are aspects of Wright's episcopate, such as his concern to impose the 1629 Instructions to preachers and his requirement that the communion table be placed at the east end of the chancel and railed, which mirror this.¹⁰⁰ However, there was an equally strong streak of pragmatism, a concern for peace and justice, and an understanding of human frailty.

Where does Wright stand amongst his fellow Arminian bishops? Despite efforts to ingratiate himself with the hierarchy, he appears to have been a moderate- luke-warm in comparison with some of his peers. Not a member of the Durham House group, he was elevated to the episcopal bench before Laud had

⁹⁹ Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p.304.

¹⁰⁰ See also, for example, article 5.4 in his 1639 Visitation Articles, where he asks, 'Have any ministers out of contempt omitted to publish the sentence of their ordinaries or ecclesiasticall governors, the next Sunday or holy day after the receipt of them'. Fincham, *Visitation Articles, II*, p.71.

consolidated his position.¹⁰¹ Compared with such enthusiastic, reforming bishops as Montagu and Duppa of Chichester, Piers of Bath and Wells, and Dee of Peterborough, Wright's episcopate lacked drive. Montagu and Dee, as well as Piers, found willing subordinates to implement their vision in the archdeaconries and parishes, unlike Wright, who failed to inspire a similar enthusiasm in his diocesan officers. His moderate Visitation Articles stand in contrast to those of Dee, who ordered all parishioners to bow on entering and leaving church, and extravagantly expressed his enthusiasm for the beauty of holiness by ordering every parish to buy a silver plate for the bread and a silver chalice for the wine. Furthermore, between 1633 and 1639, Wright's requirements at visitation remained fairly constant. There is little sense of direction, acceleration or growth in a planned programme of reform- rather a sometimes haphazard response to central directives. This was not the case in Sussex, where, as Anthony Fletcher has found, Brian Duppa greatly extended his predecessor's programme of reform in the area of church fabric and furnishings. Neither do there appear to have been similar surveys to those conducted in the dioceses of Peterborough and Chichester, which 'followed through' reforms. At Chichester archdeaconry, Montagu circumvented the churchwardens' failure to present items amiss in their church buildings by issuing commissions to visitors for the survey of churches. Such reforms were bitterly resented by a growing section of the Church; perhaps Wright's relative moderation, within Arminianism, was born of pastoral experience, and sidestepped some of the situations that arose elsewhere. The Bishop was wise enough not to follow the example of William Piers, of Bath and Wells, who suppressed all afternoon sermons and lectures within his charge. In his tactful handling of communion table issue at Coventry, he also managed to

¹⁰¹ See K.Fincham, 'William Laud and the Exercise of Ecclesiastical Patronage', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51:1 (2000), pp.69-93. According to Fincham, Laud was very influential in securing the patronage and promotion of his allies. Amongst these, he cites Skinner, Buckeridge, Montague, Howson, Curle, Mawe, Harsnett, White, Matthew Wren, Piers and Duppa.

avoid the *furor* that the more dogmatic Piers caused over a similar confrontation.¹⁰²

Modern historians have differed markedly in their estimation of Wright. Ann Hughes has maintained that he was motivated primarily by self-interest, whereas Fincham has placed him within the preacher-pastor camp, linking him with Joseph Hall.¹⁰³ Although he sometimes displayed a pastoral concern at odds with Fincham's 'disciplinary' model, there are problems with this categorisation. Wright, as Julian Davies has shown, embraced avant-garde Arminianism, which was inimical to the beliefs and liturgical practices of the Jacobean Calvinist episcopate. Nor was the Bishop, as Oldridge appears to suggest, dependent on the Metropolitan Visitation of 1635 to effectively 'kick-start' Arminian reforms within the diocese.¹⁰⁴ Wright remained his own man; self-interested, idiosyncratic, and Janus-faced: revealing his Arminian (and later Calvinist) enthusiasms to authority, while reserving a gentler aspect for some local pastoral issues. Despite his age, he could be an irascible and contentious opponent. An Arminian who sought to implement the royal Instructions with regard to preaching, and a leader under whom the railing of altars was, by some, enthusiastically undertaken, he was less doctrinaire and more pragmatic than some of his officials. Nevertheless, under his rule there was a greater stress upon clerical and lay conformity, and upon sacramentalism and uniformity. This marked a clear change of emphasis from the priorities of his predecessor, Thomas Morton, and reflected, if imperfectly, the official policy of the leaders of the national Church.

¹⁰² Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists, passim*; A.J.Fletcher, *A Community at Peace and War* (London, 1975), pp.77-85; J.Fielding, 'Arminianism in the Localities: Peterborough Diocese 1603-1642', in Fincham (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church* (Basingstoke, 1993), pp.93-114; Stieg, *Laud's Laboratory*, pp.282-309.

¹⁰³ A.Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge, 1987), p.86; K.Fincham, 'Episcopal Government', in *idem* (ed.), *Early Stuart Church*, pp.71-91.

¹⁰⁴ Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, 234-35; D.Oldridge, *Religion and Society in Early Stuart England* (Aldershot, 1998), pp.41-44.

CHAPTER 6

Puritanism in Wolverhampton and its Neighbouring Parishes

Bishop Wright, like his predecessor William Overton, complained about the state of the peculiar parishes- which comprised over a tenth of all the parishes within the boundaries of his diocese.¹ By far the greatest number were found in Staffordshire. This chapter explores the vicissitudes of religious life one of them, the Royal Peculiar of Wolverhampton, and some neighbouring parishes, in the 1620s and 30s. Its aim is to chart the attempts to plant a puritan ministry in an important market town, and the impact of the Laudian regime of the 1630s on the nascent Puritan community. This, it is hoped, will throw light on some of the current controversies concerning the period. Kevin Sharpe has argued that Charles I, not Laud was the author of ecclesiastical policies of his reign, and was concerned with church fabric, ritual, and uniformity of worship rather than matters of theology. Sharpe criticises Nicholas Tyacke for identifying doctrinal practice with liturgical and disciplinary preferences, and regarding shifts in both as 'sweeping changes' brought about by the triumph of Arminianism in the 1630s. Andrew Foster has, in turn, challenged Sharpe, asserting that the Laudians brought relentless pressure to bear on the community, creating a degree of disturbance which cannot be accounted for 'simply by talk of a new Bancroftian efficiency'.² Was Arminianism innovatory and destabilising, or were the changes of the 1630s harmless and devoid of theological significance? George Bernard has argued the Church maintained a 'middle way'. How did contemporaries perceive the 1630s?³

¹ See chapter 1, pp. 33-34; chapter 5, pp.203-204.

² K.Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (Yale, 1992), p.279; Sharpe's correspondence with N. Tyacke in *History Today*, 34 (1984), pp.56-57; A.W.Foster, 'Church Policies of the 1630s', in R.Cust and A. Hughes (eds.), *Conflict in Early Stuart England* (Harlow, 1989), p.195.

³ P.White, 'The *via media* in the early Stuart Church' in K.Fincham, *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642* (Basingstoke, 1993), pp.211-230; G.W.Bernard, 'The Church of England, c.1529-c.1640', *History*, 75 (1990), pp.183-206.

The opening section describes the parish of Wolverhampton and its religious situation prior to the arrival of the Puritan preacher, Richard Lee. The second section looks at Lee's work and significance, and is followed by an account of some of the controversies which occurred in the parish after his suspension. The chapter concludes by tracing the contours of the Puritan fraternity in some of the parishes which make up part of the Wolverhampton hinterland.

The Royal Peculiar of Wolverhampton

In the 1640s, when the Committee for Plundered Ministers recommended that Richard Lee should be given the pastoral oversight of the town, Wolverhampton was described as 'a market town containing 4,000 communicants'.⁴ Despite its size, the town did not possess a charter of incorporation, and local government was the responsibility of three manorial courts, held each October, and the Easter vestry, all of whose powers were extremely limited. According to Marie Rowlands, the manors were in the hands of a junior branch of the Leveson family, who had been papists or church papists since Mary's reign, and 'had a very interventionist approach to manorial government and the exercise of influence'.⁵ During the sixteenth century, Assizes had been held in the town, but the courts had been returned to Stafford at the command of Elizabeth I.⁶

⁴ Christopher Wren, who became Dean of Windsor and Wolverhampton in 1635, probably significantly overestimated the population of the parish, when he described it as containing 'seventeen great villages, wherein are but three chapels (of ease) not capable of a tenth part of the inhabitants, computed to have been (usually) near 30,000 souls, whereof by proportion 7 or 8,000 are thought of age to communicate'. W.N.Landor, 'Staffordshire Incumbents and Parochial Records (1530-1685)', *CHS*, p.327.

⁵ The three manors were the Deanery manor of the Borough and Foreign of Wolverhampton, the Manor of the Seven Prebends, and Stow Heath. G.P.Mander and N.W.Tildesley, *A History of Wolverhampton*, (Wolverhampton, 1960), pp.25, 137; M.B.Rowlands, ' "Rome's Snaky Brood": Catholic Yeomen, Craftsmen and Townsmen in the West Midlands, 1600-1641', *Recusant History*, 24 (October 1998), vol.24, pp.147-166.

⁶ Mander, *History of Wolverhampton*, p.47.

The Royal Peculiar of Wolverhampton had been united with the Deanery of Windsor in 1479, and was thus under the jurisdiction of a cleric whose main responsibilities were outside Staffordshire.⁷ Wolverhampton was, however, distinct from Windsor in that it had its own seal, revenues and responsibilities.⁸ The practice of leasing out church property for large sums 'down', followed by small annual payments, had the effect of preventing those who held prebends in the peculiar, and who occupied these offices between leases, from enjoying a considerable stipend. This encouraged non-residence. Of the seven prebendaries associated with the church in 1620, only one, William Bailey, who also held the local living of Pattingham, was resident in the area.⁹ The three chapels of ease were at Pelsall, Willenhall and Bilston, and were served by stipendaries. The 1604 Puritan Survey of Staffordshire recorded that Wolverhampton had seven, although the number appears to have fluctuated over the years. None was licensed to preach. The Survey alleged that 'these curates, especially two of them, Mansell and Cowper, be notorious drunkards and dissolute men'. It also noted 'many popish' and 'many recusants' living within the parish.¹⁰

Other documentation also indicates the strength of local Catholicism. According to Rowlands, 'Ashmores', an isolated moated house in Stow Heath manor, was the main Catholic centre in Wolverhampton. In the early years of the century it was the home of the church papist, Elizabeth Gifford, sister of the magistrate Sir Walter Leveson, who was of a similar persuasion. In 1633, the authorities raided the house, discovering a school for the sons of Catholic gentry, and four Jesuits. Lower down the social scale, in 1620, when the parents of William Perry of Bilston were concerned about his apparent possession, they were advised by neighbours to secure the services of a priest to exorcise him, and

⁷ A Peculiar has been defined as 'a parish church or district exempt from the jurisdiction of the ordinary or bishop of the diocese and subject to the jurisdiction of one who is virtually its own ordinary'; see J.S.Purvis, *A Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Terms*, (London, 1962), p. 143.

⁸ Stebbing Shaw, *The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire* (London, 1801), vol.ii, p.154.

⁹ Mander, *Wolverhampton*, p.72.

¹⁰ A.Peel, 'A Puritan Survey of the Church in Staffordshire in 1604', *English Historical Review*, xxvi (1911), p.351.

eventually obtained three through the local Catholic ‘network’.¹¹ The strength of local Catholicism is shown in the list of Staffordshire recusants, drawn up in 1641. Returns from the area include five at Wednesbury, twenty-five at Patshull, eighteen at Bushbury, twenty-four at Sedgley and 128 in the Royal Peculiar.¹²

The strength of Catholicism was, in some measure, a consequence of the weakness of Protestantism in Wolverhampton. Unlike both Shrewsbury and Coventry, the reformation does not appear to have received enthusiastic local support, either from the clergy or the laity. Wolverhampton did not have a Puritan ‘tradition’, and possessed no comparable figures to Archdeacon Thomas Lever at Coventry and Thomas Ashton, the preacher/schoolmaster of Shrewsbury, or the nonconformists Humphrey Fenn and Edmund Bulkeley. Although John Tomkys, the Puritan, came from Bilston, and was resident in the parish when he published translations of Bullinger, he was appointed to St.Mary’s Shrewsbury in 1582 (the patronage of which had been secured for the town, through Ashton’s efforts) and it was there that he was engaged in attempting to establish a godly commonwealth until his death, ten years later.¹³ By contrast, the effects of the Reformation came only slowly and gradually to Wolverhampton. In 1570, although the crucifix and its accompanying figures had been removed from the rood loft at St. Peter’s, the

¹¹ R. Baddeley, *The Boy of Bilson* (London, 1622), pp. 63-66; Rowlands, ‘“Rome’s Snaky Brood”’, p.158; Mander, *Wolverhampton*, p.62; Public Record Office SP 16/294/74.

¹² Other Catholic strongholds were Brewood, Lapley and Handsworth. Two other recusant returns for the county were those of 1607 and 1635. All three are listed in *Staffordshire Catholic History*. M.W.Greenslade, (ed.), ‘The 1607 Return of Staffordshire Catholics, *S.C.H.*, 4 (1963/4), pp.6-32: J. Hampartumian, (ed.), ‘Staffordshire Recusants in 1635’, *S.C.H.*, 22 (1984), pp.5-23; A.J.Kettle, ‘A List of Staffordshire Recusants’, (1641), *S.C.H.*, 5 (1964), pp.1-37. In the two earlier returns there are some gaps, presumably because of the special nature of some parishes, for instance recusants within the royal peculiar of Wolverhampton are not included nor are those within the parish of Brewood (a peculiar of the dean and chapter of Lichfield). The 1641 list was compiled at a time of strong anti-Catholic feeling. Kettle’s list is taken from a book, found amongst the papers of Sir Richard Leveson of Trentham, which is a copy of a series of bills enrolled on the Quarter Sessions Roll for Epiphany 1640/1. (Staffordshire Record Office, Q/SO, Epiph. 1640/1, nos.60-66).

¹³ G.P.Mander, *The Wolverhampton Antiquary* (Wolverhampton, 1938), vol.i, pp. 69-83; P.Collinson, ‘The Shearman’s Tree and the Preacher: the Strange Death of Merry England in Shrewsbury and Beyond’ in P.Collinson and J.Craig (eds.), *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp.205-220; B.Coulton, ‘Implementing the Reformation in the Urban Community: Coventry and Shrewsbury 1559-1603’, *Midland History*, xxv (2000), pp.43-60.

platform still remained in place, and, two years later, the chapter house still contained such Catholic artefacts as 'two hanginges for an altar, one corporass case with cloth to lap bred in, a holly water pott of brasse' and 'a sencer of brasse'.¹⁴ Thirty years later, the Puritan survey recorded that the clerical situation remained far from satisfactory.¹⁵ It was not until 1633, after the death of William Bailey, the official at St. Peter's, that the Dean was moved to take an interest in his charge. Prior to this, under Bailey's long and negligent surrogacy (1610?-1633), Wolverhampton appears to have been left alone. Bailey was very lax in ensuring that some of the requirements of the liturgy were observed, and during his time the parish perambulation was completely neglected. This was not an indication of powerful reformed sympathies on his part; an entry in the churchwardens' accounts for 1615 records that 4/6d. was paid for 'singinge breade'!¹⁶

It was the perceived weakness of Protestantism in the area that led Joseph Hall to become prebendary of Willenhall in about 1610. He had been persuaded to seek this position by Samuel Burton, the Wolverhampton-born Archdeacon of Gloucester, who also held the prebend of Featherstone within the peculiar. According to Hall, Burton 'pitying the miserable condition of his native church, importuned me to move some of his friends to solicit the Dean of Windsor, who was patron, to grant a prebend'.¹⁷ It was not its value, Hall emphasised, 'at which he aimed, but the freedom of the Church'. Hall was made Dean of Worcester in 1616, but was still mindful of the responsibilities concomitant with the retention of his prebendal seat at St. Peter's. Consequently he later wrote that 'in a just pity

¹⁴ Wolverhampton Record Office, D/NWT/12, N.W.Tildesley, 'Wolverhampton in the 16th. and 17th. Centuries', pp.5-6.

¹⁵ See above, p.219.

¹⁶ *C.H.S.* (1915), p.333; SP 16/287/2; SP 16/388/ 41 III, reply to 4th. article; W.R.O., D/NWT/15. In the brieve of the 1634 perambulation, some of those involved stated that when they perambulated around Pelsall liberty the outbounds of a part of the parish were declared to be the 'meares' between Norton and Pelsall. This was confirmed by 'divers of Pelsall' who certified that 'they went in the last perambulation about 25 yeares past unto that place'. W.R.O., D/NWT/1. Under the Elizabethan settlement, 'singing bread', the wafer used at the mass, was prohibited for use at Communion.

¹⁷ *The Remaining Works of that Incomparable Prelate, Joseph Hall, D.D.* (London, 1660), p.27.

of the mean provision , if not the destitution of so many thousand souls, and a desire and care to have them comfortably provided for, I resigned up the said prebend to a worthy preacher, Mr. Lee, who should constantly reside there, and lovingly instruct that long-neglected people'.¹⁸

Richard Lee

The arrival of Richard Lee was to mark the beginning of a significant Puritan presence in Wolverhampton. From the neighbourhood of Brighthelm, Leicestershire, where his family possessed some freehold, Lee graduated M.A. from Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1613.¹⁹ Coming to Wolverhampton in c. 1623 he was enabled to pursue his calling through the augmentation of his living by some London merchants. His one existing publication, *The Spiritual Spring*, dedicated 'to the worshipful, and his loving friends, the gentlemen of London, Benefactors of the preaching of the word of God at Wolverhampton', is, in part, an expression of thanks for their generosity.²⁰ Their support signifies that Lee had acquired a reputation for zeal and orthodoxy which recommended him to a number of wealthy London merchants as a worthy recipient of their patronage.

The sermon and its dedication reveal aspects of Lee's personality and concerns. Believing the Church to be under threat ('sin reigns in the taking away of Church rites') he blessed God that his hearers had been stirred up to be instruments to spread 'heaven's sunshine to those who sit in blackness'. 'Happy be that angel', he continued, 'that called upon you to send help into our Macedonia, I mean, to establish the preaching of the Word of God in the place where I now dwell'.

Of his experience in the Wolverhampton area, he wrote, 'I never knew any part of the kingdom where Rome's snaky brood roosted and rested themselves more

¹⁸ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁹ J.Venn and J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1923), part 1.

²⁰ R.Lee, *The Spiritual Spring, A Sermon preached at Paul's* (London, 1625), preface.

warmer and safer, and with greater countenance, than in our country'.²¹ These remarks reveal Lee's perception of the missionary nature of his task, further stressed by his exhortation to his listeners to let their 'purses hire preachers', for where there was no reformed ministry the local population was in great spiritual danger:

I have observed myself dwelling in a country where Popery and ignorance doth lamentably flourish, and their nests are for the most part in the parish of some ten pound Levite, and we shall often hear that in those places, some one or other is drawn to the superstitious faction, and no marvel when men's minds are as tabula nuda, fit for any impression, and so embrace that Religion which is next to them, be it what it will.²²

Hall's support and encouragement probably enhanced Lee's standing in the community. So did the linking of his name with Hall and Samuel Burton in a matter concerning Wolverhampton Grammar School. The School was largely funded by the Merchant Taylors' Company in London, who were concerned that the establishment's standards were falling. To facilitate a more independent examination of the School, the Dean of Worcester and the Archdeacon of Gloucester gave their services in undertaking an inspection. The Merchant Taylors informed the various interested parties of their intentions by letter, explaining the duties which Hall and Burton would perform, 'taking unto them Mr. Lee, your preacher at Wolverhampton, to make a judicial examination of the school, so that we may understand where defects lie, and whereby we may be better able to remedy what is amiss'.²³

Lee was at the forefront of Puritan activities in the area for a number of years. He preached regularly at St. Peter's, the Collegiate church, sometimes travelling to the nearby church of St. Michael's, Tettenhall to preach or catechise on

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p.9.

²³ G.P.Mander, *The History of Wolverhampton School* (Wolverhampton, 1913), p.98.

a Sunday afternoon.²⁴ Lee was also an influential figure in the parish of Bushbury, which lies to the north of Wolverhampton. By 1626, he held the patronage jointly with Jonas Grosvenor; Lee's beliefs would have influenced the type of clergyman to whom the living was offered.²⁵

Under Lee, the Puritan constituency was enlarged. Diligent in his preaching and teaching, he won Hall's commendation, who commented that he had conducted his ministry with 'great mutual contentment and happy success', a view later endorsed by both the Committee for Plundered Ministers and William Prynne.²⁶ Conversions took place under his preaching, private and public fast days were observed, and the local Puritan laity were strengthened in their faith by associating with fellow-believers and 'the best ministers'.²⁷ Some aspects of Lee's less public activities can be deduced from articles objected against William Pinson, an attorney, who came before the High Commission in 1638.²⁸ Lee's name occurs with reference to a meeting or meetings that took place in his house, which Pinson attended, for the edification of the godly ('conventicles' in Laudian terminology), where the Scriptures were expounded and there was extemporary prayer. These were occasions in which the distinction between the cleric and members of his flock was less evident, because of the mutual participation amongst the men present in acts of worship. Such behaviour was an anathema to the Laudians, with their insistence on the separateness of the priestly office and their emphases on the

²⁴ Mander, *Wolverhampton Antiquary*, vol i, p.308.

²⁵ Hamlet Bourne became vicar in 1631. His predecessor had been Francis Colley was incumbent of the parish for fifty-eight years (1568-1626). The Survey of 1604 found him to be 'a mere worldling'. The 1607 list of recusants consists of six names. When Bourne subscribed recusant names in 1635 this number had increased to twenty one. The impression received is that the later vicar was more zealous in his compilation than his predecessor had been, rather than the increase being caused by an influx of Catholics into the area in the intervening years. Bourne adds some comments to this register, including that 'Angela Moseley hath laboured to seduce Jane, the wife of John Egginton, from our religion', and his observation that 'Thomas Pearson, servant to Lucretia Moseley, widow', (a recusant) 'lived with her the space of a year, yet seldom came to church nor to catechism at all'. *C.H.S.* (1915), p.45; *S.C.H.*, 22, p.7.

²⁶ *Remaining Works of Joseph Hall*, p.27; *C.H.S.* (1915), p.347; W.Prynne, *Canterburies Doome* (London, 1646), p.380.

²⁷ I.Smart and E.Archer, *A More Exact and Perfect Relation of the Treachery, Apprehension...and Execution of Francis Pitt* (London, 1644), pp.3,5,6,8.

²⁸ SP 16/388/41, II and III.

importance of the liturgy and the sanctified nature of church buildings. Lee, like some of his ministerial peers, did not feel himself bound by some of the prayer book stipulations (he was accused of churching refractory women in private), and opposed ecclesiastical orders promoting the Laudian concept of the 'beauty of holiness'.²⁹

The death of the official, William Bailey, in 1633, marked the beginning of a local Laudian reformation. According to Bishop Wright (writing to Sir Nathaniel Brent), Wolverhampton had been 'very faulty heretofore in harbouringe Papists and nonconformists', but Matthew Wren (1585-1667), the dean of Windsor and Wolverhampton, had since taken special care for 'Reformacon both of that Collegiate Church and jurisdiction, wherein his wisdome hath proceeded with good Successe and is likely to prosper therein every day more and more'.³⁰ Wren attempted to regulate the worship at St. Peter's, introducing some 'very good Chapter Acts and other Orders ... to settle thinges there in a Church waye'. Edward Latham, an enthusiastic Laudian, was appointed to succeed Bailey as surrogate, and, in 1634, the church undertook its first parish perambulation in a quarter of a century. It is probable that Lee was prohibited from delivering Sunday afternoon lectures in the church, and certain that Wren complained to Laud that Lee's carriage was so 'factious that he could keep him in no order'.³¹

Prior to the Metropolitan Visitation of 1635, William Dell, Laud's secretary, informed Nathaniel Brent that, despite Wren's reforms, Wolverhampton was 'much given to faction'. Dell asked Brent to take special notice of Lee, whom he accused of being both 'the author of much disorder thereabouts', and 'averse to all good Orders of the Church'. If Brent could 'fasten upon anything', whereby Lee could be censured, he was to do so. In any event, he was not to be given a licence to preach,

²⁹ Prynne, *Canterburies Doome*, p.380.

³⁰ SP 16/287/2.

³¹ Prynne, *Canterburies Doome*, p.380; J.Bliss (ed.), *The Works of William Laud*, vol.iv (Oxford, 1854), pp.301-302.

either in Wolverhampton or the peculiar of Tettenhall. If Brent wished to find out more about Lee's nonconformity he was to speak to Edward Latham.³²

Brent arrived in Wolverhampton in May 1635 and suspended Lee for nonconformity. Lee moved to Shrewsbury and later to Shoreditch. He returned to the parish in 1646, having been recommended to the Committee for Plundered Ministers as a 'godly and orthodox divine' who had been a 'constant, diligent and faithful preacher' in the town until his suspension.³³

Controversies in Wolverhampton

While Lee's removal may be ascribed to the effect of ecclesiastical changes at national and diocesan level, it is also clear that the Puritan presence was also meeting opposition locally, where Latham was keen to suppress and inform on local non-conformists. Conflict arose in 1635, although some contentions probably predated this. Wren's Chapter Acts of 1634 had met with some local disapproval. The objectors hoped to use the opportunity of the Metropolitan Visitation to have them invalidated, but Laud pre-empted them by ordering that none of Wren's acts or orders be reversed or altered without his knowledge. They were later confirmed by the Chapter in 1636, after his brother Christopher had succeeded him as Dean. At the same meeting Sir Francis Windebanke was elected as high steward to 'protect and defend' St. Peter's.³⁴

The seeds of other confrontation were also sown in 1635, after the construction of a new organ, which was completed before the dedication of the communion table as an altar at St. Peter's on Sunday 11th. October, 1635.³⁵ Occurring less than six months after Christopher Wren's installation as dean, it is possible that the event was instigated by his brother, although Christopher was also

³² Prynne, *Canterburies Doome*, p.380.

³³ *CHS*, (1915), p.327.

³⁴ Prynne, *Canterburies Doome*, p.380; LJRO, Pwol/Ch 1636/7.

³⁵ This replaced the communion table which had been used since the destruction of the Marian altar. WRO D/NWT/12, p.5.

an enthusiastic proponent of the Laudian changes.³⁶ The event brought the town some notoriety nationally, at least three contemporary works referring to the occasion.³⁷ According to Prynne, Edward Latham arrived in Wolverhampton on Saturday the 10th., accompanied by men, women and choristers from Lichfield, to dedicate the communion table as an altar and consecrate certain altar-cloths to the 'glory of God'. He was met by a deputation of Collegiate clergy and local inhabitants. The table was new, 'exquisitely wrought and inlaid', being railed off from the congregation. Upon it was a richly coloured cloth on which stood an ornate communion book. Above the table were the Ten Commandments and on either side of these hung two substantial pieces of white calico, with embroidered portrayals of St. Peter (beneath whom was St. George treading on the dragon) and, on the other, St. Paul with a sword in his hand, pictured in Prynne's words 'like a persecutor, not an apostle'.

Prynne described the dedication of the table in great detail, with particular emphasis on the ceremonial aspects of the occasion, such as the clergy's obeisance as they entered the 'great church door' and the symbolic washing of hands in the chancel. At the service incense was burned, 'and then they returned making three congies apiece and went to service, which was solemnly performed, the organs blowing, great singing not heard in this church before, which kind of service lasted two hours at least'. After all was consecrated, communion was celebrated, at which only those wearing copes officiated. These robes had been especially brought from Lichfield for the event. Afterwards clergy and congregation adjourned for lunch

³⁶ Matthew Wren, as master of Peterhouse, Cambridge, introduced the Latin service in the college chapel. Later, when bishop of Norwich and then Ely, he enthusiastically enforced the metropolitan order of 1634 which required that railed communion tables were placed altarwise at the east end of the chancel and communicants to receive at the rail. Christopher Wren had been domestic chaplain to Lancelot Andrewes, who was the first bishop associated with the rail. Wren passed on Andrewes' chapel plan to Laud and some other bishops, who used it as a model for their own chapels. As rector of East Knoyle, he was responsible for the placing of fretwork pictures of the evangelists, ascension, Trinity and Jacob's Ladder in the chancel. *D.N.B.*; J.Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church* (Oxford, 1992), pp.216, 219; A.G.Matthews (ed.), *Walker Revised* (Oxford, 1988), pp.382-3.

³⁷ Prynne, *A Quench-Coal*; R.Baillie, *The Canterburians' Self-Conviction*, (Edinburgh, 1640); Henry Burton, *For God and the King*, (London, 1636).

and returned in the afternoon to hear a sermon. Prynne comments: 'It is well they would allow an afternoon sermon to grace this dedication since they admit none since'. 'To grace the solemnity and consecration of the altar higher', he continues, 'the next day being Monday, they of Lichfield went out of town very drunk'.³⁸

Such sacramentalism was in complete contrast to the word-centred ministry of Richard Lee. Moreover, the number of clergy present and the intricacies of the service were a radical departure from the regular week-by-week worship at St. Peter's in the early 1630's. There is evidence that the usual clerical complement in the church at this time was two curates.³⁹ Furthermore, although the burial register intimates that there was a choir at the church, the most impressive choral contribution at the dedication came from the efforts of choristers from the Cathedral, which was described as 'great singing not heard in this church before'.⁴⁰ Prynne gives a clear impression that the consecration was imposed from outside the community, the innovation being introduced by priests who were not local and had to bring with them the necessary religious artefacts to be used to perform the ceremony in the correct manner.

The confrontations which occurred between the ecclesiastical hierarchy and members of the Puritan fraternity from 1635 onwards indicate the extent to which Laudian innovations emphasised and exacerbated divisions within the church community. In 1638, an attorney, William Pinson, came before the court of High Commission.⁴¹ Pinson's case was of particular significance for the Laudians because of his social position, and because of the network of godly people with whom he was associated. He was charged with ten articles of ecclesiastical offences, including being 'inconformable to the Church of England and very

³⁸ Prynne, *A Quench-Coal*, pp. 196-199.

³⁹ In 1637 Hugh Davies and Richard Williams, who were facing a charge at Quarter Sessions, had the case against them dismissed by 'the whole bench of justices, the church of Wolverhampton being altogether destitute of any curate or minister to read prayers or divine service'. Mander, *Wolverhampton Antiquary*, vol.1, p.262.

⁴⁰ See *C.H.S.*, (1915), p.334; the parish register includes these entries:
bur. 13th. Nov. 1637, John Thrustones, 'one of the singing men';
bur. 11th. April, 1640, William Tompkis, 'singing man and clerk'.

⁴¹ S.P. 16/388/41, II and III.

obstinate and perverse therein', maintaining conventicles in his own home, and frequenting such meetings in the homes of others (such as Lee).

Pinson denied the charge of 'inconformity'. Admitting to praying with his family and 'conceiving prayers of his own', he also acknowledged that he had repeated sermons and read and expounded the Scriptures to them. When thus engaged, persons of other families had sometimes come to his home 'either by chance or business'. Nevertheless, he denied that he kept any conventicle in his house and also denied attending conventicles in the homes of friends; gatherings, at which he was present, may have discussed Scripture and prayed extemporaneously, but this had occurred naturally rather than by appointment or on purpose.⁴²

The fourth article concerned his wife's attendance at St. Peter's for her churching. It stated that when

demanded by the priest why she did not wear a veil, she answered she would not, and being told by the priest that he was commanded by the ordinary not to church any but such as came thither reverently and lowly in their veils, she in the church, after prayers ended, scornfully pulled off her hat and put a table napkin on her head, and put on her hat, again, and so departed from church.

In reply Pinson said that his wife had come to church 'without a veil on her head, as divers others had there used to come and in such a reverent manner as he believeth the Law requireth', and that when the curate, Hugh Davies, spoke to her she put a veil on her head. According to Pinson, Davies nevertheless refused to church her, 'and so she departed unchurched, to her' (and her husband's) 'great grief'.⁴³

⁴² Canon 73 forbade ministers and the laity meeting in private homes or elsewhere to consult on any matter or course to be taken which would tend to the 'impeaching or depraving of the doctrine of the Church of England, or of the Book of Common Prayer, or any part of the government and discipline now established in the Church of England' on pain of excommunication. E. Cardwell, *Synodalia* (Oxford, 1852), vol.i, p.288. See above, p.228. The charge against Pinson points to a difference in the interpretation of the canon by the Puritans and hierarchy. Whereas the former looked on such meetings as occasions for mutual edification, the Laudians believed they subverted church order and liturgy, and pressed the canon accordingly.

⁴³ SP 16/388/41, III.

This article and the examinee's reply reveal differing perceptions of the concept of 'reverence'. Both parties emphasised its indispensability, Davies insisting that it was evidenced by the wearing of a veil, and Pinson retorting that his wife was complying sufficiently by her attitude alone. The difference in the two parties' theology is illustrated, as well as the attempted enforcement of the veil on the authority of the ordinary and its rejection. To the High Church party a lack of willingness to subscribe to the ceremonies of the Church showed inconformity to an institution built on Apostolic foundations. To Puritans, Laudian order and 'seemliness' in worship threatened a return to Catholicism and a dangerous shift in emphasis from 'heart' religion to the emptiness of mere external conformity and idolatry.⁴⁴

In sum, Pinson was charged with being inconformable, disrespectful to God, His clergy and His Church, and of being vengeful and malicious. To be categorised as such was to be regarded as 'factious' in the eyes of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, a subverter and opposer of all good church order. Yet Pinson was from yeoman stock, by profession an attorney and, through his marriage, well-connected. It was the pursuit of his religion that brought him into conflict with the authorities, and the articles against him at High Commission are a measure of the shift in the perceptions and priorities that had taken place in the church hierarchy, both locally and nationally, since Lee's arrival in the peculiar twelve years before.

The most extreme evidence of local confrontation and polarisation is provided by one Tarte, a Wolverhampton man who fled to America to escape from the discipline that Edward Latham was meting out to non-conformists.⁴⁵ Writing to Latham from the safety of his new home, Tarte denounced his former persecutor. 'Mr. Latham so it is that being delivered out of your cruel hands I can do no less

⁴⁴ See P. Lake, 'The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s' in K. Fincham (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church* (Basingstoke, 1993), pp.161-186; Baillie, *Canterburians' Self-Conviction*; see above, pp.226,227; below, pp.231-233.

⁴⁵ Tarte wrote a letter to Latham which Mander dates as 'about 1640'. See Mander, *Wolverhampton Antiquary*, vol. I, pp.218-220; S.P. 16/474/74.

than write to you, to certify that though you plot wickedness ... to take the innocent without a cause, yet all your power shall come to naught'. One of Tarte's friends had been on the receiving end of Latham's and the Church's discipline. He was unsure of the outcome 'for I know not how it fares with our dear friend ... William Knight, for I think you are heir to your father Bonner'. Tarte's mother had gone to see Latham, and as he writes 'would have given you money for my freedom, but it was grief to my soul: I am glad she did not'.

The letter is full of apocalyptic invective, the writer taking Latham to be 'one of the very limbs of the beast that did ascend out of the bottomless pit and shall go into perdition'. Tarte saw Latham as the author of his woes and the representative of Rome when he wrote, 'it rejoiceth my soul to think that Babylon must fall and come to destruction. What is Babylon but that confused rabble of that popish hierarchy whereof you be a main pillar'? Tarte's invective verged on the hysterical; nevertheless his accusation that Latham sought the 'ruin of Gods servants, and [that he] persecute[d] them with might & mayne' was not an uncommon reaction amongst Caroline Puritans when faced with the vindictiveness of the Laudian hierarchy. Latham passed the letter on to High Commission.

With the collapse of Laudianism in the early 1640s, there were widespread attacks on communion rails and altars, both by 'Parliamentary Ordinance and by free-lance reform and iconoclasm', which reveal the unpopularity of these innovations. Wolverhampton was the scene of one such assault and is an example of a popular local action motivated by doctrinal concerns.⁴⁶ On the night of 8 March 1641, between the hours of ten and twelve, eight people broke into St. Peter's. The prime mover, the ironmonger John Cowper, had previously received the key to the north door of the Church from the hands of the eight year-old daughter of Sylvester

⁴⁶ See D.Cressy, 'The Battle of the Altars', in *Travesties and Transgressions* (Oxford, 1999), pp.186-212.

and Elizabeth Pearson.⁴⁷ Sylvester was a clerk associated with the Church, and his daughter had given the key to Cowper with her mother's consent, although Mrs. Pearson later claimed ignorance of Cowper's motives.⁴⁸ Having gained entrance, the trespassers broke down the rail separating the 'altar' from the rest of the chancel, tore up the mat on which people kneeled to receive the sacrament and carried the table into the nave.

Fifteen days later Walter Wrottesley, J.P., received a deputation of eight prominent citizens, who informed him that 'divers ill-affected, ill-disposed and malicious persons did break and enter into the church ... and did then and there most profanely, irreverently and absurdly' carry out their act of delinquency, 'without any power or authority to them granted or committed in that behalf'.⁴⁹ The examinations of Cowper, Robert and John Ebbe (brasiers), Mrs. Elizabeth Pearson and William Perry, a shoemaker, then followed. Apart from Pearson, they all admitted taking part in the break-in. The group's Puritan beliefs were their motivation. Robert Ebbe in his examination 'being further demanded why he did the same, answered it was made an idol of and would do it again if it were to do'.⁵⁰ Cowper denied the charge that he had been persuaded or set on by others. The outcome of the examination was that Cowper, the Ebbes and William Perry were

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Pearson was baptised on 18 November, 1632. *Wolverhampton Parish Register, 1603-1660*.

⁴⁸ SRO, Q/S.R., E.1641, ff.11-13.

Elizabeth, the wife of Sylvester Pearson, may have been Richard Lee's sister. In his will, dated 9 June, 1647, (P.C.C. 96, Pembroke) he left money for 'his sister Elizabeth Pearson'. This might explain Mrs. Pearson's amenability to Cowper's request for the key. Unfortunately there is no extant record of the marriage of the Pearsons in the Wolverhampton register; there are no entries during the years 1622-1629.

⁴⁹ The deputation included a churchwarden, Richard Williams and Hugh Davies, both curates at St. Peter's, and Hugh Granger, one of the constables. Others were Thomas Littleton, Esq., two described as 'gentlemen', and a vintner. One of the gentlemen was Richard Barnefield, a prosperous Wolverhampton attorney. Mander suggests that when Charles stayed a night at Wolverhampton after the battle of Naseby, he lodged at the home of Barnefield's widow. SRO, Q/S.R., E.1641, f.11; Mander, *Wolverhampton*, p.90.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, the Puritan John Bradshaw's anti-kneeling tract, *A Proposition of Kneeling in the very Act of Receiving*, (1605). See chapter 3. Prynne argues at length that in the days of the primitive Church, the communion table stood in the midst of the assembly. This point is laboured and he produces "unanswerable" reasons for placing it in the midst of the church or chancel. He also examines those reasons 'which are, or can be alleged by our novellas' for placing the communion table altarwise, all of which he refutes. Prynne, *A Quench Coal*, pp.12,69.

fined £3. 6s. 8d, and three others who were deemed to have been less culpable were fined 3s 4d.

Despite the clear social distinctions between the complainants and the delinquents, 'the godly' could be found in all walks of life, and the break-in shows that Puritanism was not the preserve of well-to-do middling sorts alone. It reveals a tenacious enthusiasm for 'painful religion' amongst some of those lower down the social scale whose actions were based on a clear understanding of reformed doctrine and who were prepared to act corporately to express their disapproval. When Cowper was examined concerning his part in the removal of the altar into the nave, he added the phrase 'where it now standeth', which was at least fifteen days after its removal from the chancel. The inaction of the ecclesiastical authorities may indicate their recognition of the popularity of the move, and the growing strength of anti-Laudianism within the parish.

Taken chronologically, a pattern seems to emerge from these three reactions to Laudianism. Pinson's replies at High Commission were a measured response to the articles against him and protested his innocence, while Tarte's broadside from the safety of America was vitriolic, but powerless. Both contrasted with the actions of the 'common people', their admission of the break-in, and the boldness of Robert Ebbe's statement that he would tear down the altar rail, and drag the table into the nave 'again if it were to do'. These responses indicate that there remained a spectrum of Puritan views in the local community. They also suggest that Puritans became more militant over time, and that the effect of Laudianism was to push them to more extreme positions.

The Local Puritan Fraternity

The Puritan fraternity in south-western Staffordshire extended beyond the confines of the parishes immediately adjacent to Wolverhampton, and was strengthened by a spiritual cross-pollination from within the area, as well as from further afield. William Pinson played a key role in this process. Born in 1600, the

son of a yeoman in Nether Shambles Row, Wolverhampton, Pinson was educated at the Grammar School and became an attorney. He married Elizabeth, the daughter of Humphrey Jorden of Dunsley, Kinver, in 1627, and settled in Kinver for several years following his marriage. This parish, to the south west of Wolverhampton, was the only one amongst thirteen in the vicinity in the 1604 Survey which had a resident licensed preacher, the stipendary William Shelburne, who occupied the curacy until 1610.⁵¹ Some years later William Moseley, a London leatherseller, bequeathed £200 to his Company, to be invested in land. Two-thirds of the rent from the investment was to be allocated to a preacher who would give a sermon in Kinver Church every Sunday, and the remainder to a school master. The Company's response was slow, and it was not until 1627 that the land was purchased. In the meantime another preacher, Edward Jones, had become curate. His preaching failed to satisfy some local Puritans because, during his ministry, a number approached the Feoffees for Improvements and asked them for a good preacher and schoolmaster (an action presumably influenced by the inactivity of the Leathersellers' Company)- a request indicative of a significant Puritan presence in the area. The Feoffees obtained £560, a sum given by several London merchants which included a contribution from Edward Jorden of Dunsley, William Pinson's brother-in-law.⁵² They intervened in parish affairs in 1630, the last year of Edward Jones' incumbency, taking a one thousand year lease from John Whorwood of the great tithes of Kinver and Whittington, most of those of Halfcot and nearly all the small tithes in the parish. They then leased the tithes back to Whorwood for 999 years at a rent of £50 per annum, of which £33 6s 8d. was to be paid to a lecturer, £10 to a curate and £6 13s 4d. to a schoolmaster.⁵³

⁵¹ The parishes were Bushbury, Wolverhampton, Tettenhall, Codsall, Wombourne, Penn, Kinver, Pattingham, Trysull, Himley, Sedgley, Darlaston and Enfield (?Enville). The latter three contained ministers who were licensed to preach, but were pluralists and non-resident.

⁵² Edward Jorden probably lived at Dunsley manor in the parish. In the year before his death he was assessed on six hearths. He had a flock of about 150 sheep. *V.C.H., Staffs*, xx, pp.124,139,208.

⁵³ See *V.C.H., Staffs*, iii, p.58; taken from SRO D1197/13/17.

In the 1630's the curate at Kinver was John Cross, whose preaching attracted people from neighbouring parishes to his Sunday afternoon sermon. One of his auditors was the wife of Sir Ambrose Grey from the adjacent parish of Enville; she was later accused of 'going to hear Mr. Cross a lecturer at Kinver upon Sundays in the afternoon'.⁵⁴ In 1646, Cross was commended by the Committee for Plundered Ministers, who described him as 'a learned and orthodox divine' and augmented his maintenance. A painful ministry at Kinver thus survived the disbanding of the Feoffees for Improvements.

This was not the case in the parish of Tipton. In 1629 the Feoffees had obtained a lease for the nomination of the curacy of St. Martin's and were also providing the maintenance of the incumbent.⁵⁵ The curate from c.1621 was Robert Atkins. He retained his living after 1629, which is indicative of the theological position he held. The Feoffees were suppressed by the Crown in 1633 and Atkins was later silenced as a result of the Laudian Visitation.⁵⁶ His place was taken by John Bisbie, who later became prebendary of Prees. Bisbie was later sequestered by Parliament.

To the immediate west of Wolverhampton lies Tettenhall, a royal peculiar. Since the Dissolution the church, the lands pertaining to the parish had belonged to the Wrottesley family. According to the Puritan Survey of 1604 the minister was not a licensed preacher. Thomas Beiston held the cure from c.1620 to his death on 31 December 1652. His churchmanship is not certain, but the fact that Richard Lee catechised and preached at Tettenhall may be indicative of his theological leanings. Significantly Beiston retained the living in the 1640s when many ministers unsympathetic or hostile to a reformed ministry were removed from their charges.

⁵⁴ *C.H.S* (1915), p.113; LJRO, B/V/1/55, p.7; *V.C.H., Staffs*, vol.xx, p.155.

⁵⁵ Isobel Calder, 'A Seventeenth Century Attempt to Purify the Anglican Church', *American Historical Review*, 53 (1947-48), pp.760-775.

⁵⁶ SP16/287/20.

At Wombourne, to the south of Tettenhall, the Puritans were able to establish a significant presence. At the turn of the century the living was held by Edward, Lord Dudley, but it was later bought by John Wollaston. Wollaston, a native of Tettenhall, became a citizen of London. A prosperous goldsmith, knighted in 1641, he was active on the Parliamentary side in the Civil War, becoming Lord Mayor in 1644.⁵⁷ He presented Ithiel Smart to the living of Wombourne-cum-Trysull in 1632. Smart, a graduate of Emmanuel College Cambridge, held the living for twenty years (1632-1652), although the parish register records that he was absent from his charge from 1642 to 1648 'by reason of the war'.⁵⁸ Like some of his ministerial peers, Smart's conformity was partial. In April 1639 he was presented for keeping a fast, 'contrary to the King's proclamation', immediately after the episcopal visitation. On the following Sunday he preached at Trysull for seven hours, with a break of an hour at midday.⁵⁹ Commended in 1646 as a 'godly and orthodox divine' by the Committee for Plundered Ministers, from 1652 until his death in 1661 Smart was vicar of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, a town associated earlier in the century with the ministry of Arthur Hildersham. He wrote in the Wombourne Parish Register of his presentation to the vicarage by Wollaston, 'He conferred it most willingly on me'.⁶⁰

The parish register contains a section which included 'a record of the things that have been bought for the church, and of the special repairs done ... and other memorable things done ... since the time I was admitted vicar of Wombourne, which was August 31st., 1632'.⁶¹

The register indicates Smart's Puritan principles, and how he sought their implementation. It opens with the information that a new pulpit was erected in 1633. In 1637 the chancel was 'new painted and adorned with sentences and compartments', that is with Scripture verses, presumably enclosed within painted rectangular frames- decorations in marked contrast to those around the

⁵⁷ W.K.Jordan, *The Charities of London, 1480-1660* (London, 1960), pp. 160,171,265,365.

⁵⁸ C.H.S.(1915), pp. 141-143.

⁵⁹ LJRO, B/C/3/16, April 1639.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Stebbing Shaw, *History and Antiquities of Staffordshire*, vol.2, p.*217.

⁶¹ SRO, 3710/1/1.

Wolverhampton altar. Work which was voluntarily undertaken for the upkeep and maintenance of the building and its immediate surroundings at Wombourne in no way distracted from the supremacy of the preached word.

A further indication of Smart's outlook can be found in his comment on a severe fire which broke out in the parish in 1636. In the space of an hour it destroyed seven houses, outbuildings and 'a great quantity of corn, wool, bedding, brass' and other goods. 'This fire happened', commented Smart, 'as it pleased God'. Concluding the entry, he wrote, 'the Lord sanctify His hand to us, and preserve us from such like casualties'.⁶² Although, as Alexandra Walsham has recently shown, such views were not peculiar to Puritans and enjoyed 'near universal acceptance', they bear witness to the immanence of the Transcendent in Smart's perception of events, events which would have passed through his own particular theological sieve before their significance could be satisfactorily discerned.⁶³

The vicar's Parliamentary and religious sympathies were clearly outlined in the entry for 7 September 1641, where he recorded:

...there was a day of public thanksgiving, appointed by an ordinance of Parliament for the peace concluded between England and Scotland, on which day myself and the parishioners and inhabitants of Wombourne took the Protestation set out by order of Parliament, and covenanted together first to maintain the true reformed Protestant religion; secondly the royal estate, person, and honour of the King's majesty; thirdly the power and privileges of Parliament...

The manuscript also contains a list of curates who served under Smart. In 1636 a 'Mr. Watson' was preferred to a charge in Shropshire, being succeeded by Richard Knott. In 1638 Nathaniel Smart, the vicar's nephew, began to officiate in the parish. In 1640 he became chaplain to the Puritan 'Squire Leigh of Rushall

⁶² An entry for April 1635 recorded: 'Thomas Rider who was struck blind by God's providence, being impatient under his cross, cut his own throat'. Shaw, *History of Staffs.*, vol.2, p.*217.

⁶³ A. Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999).

Hall' and he was succeeded by his brother, Ezekiel Smart. Like his sibling and uncle before him, Ezekiel was a graduate of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. In such a way the particular theological emphases of the ministry were secured. The influence of Smart's Puritanism in Wombourne was noticed quite early on in his ministry, for by 1638 the number of painful ministers who preached in the village, under his aegis, had come to the attention of the Laudian hierarchy. The parish was described as a place 'where divers inconformable ministers do use to preach'.⁶⁴

The register refers to the successes of John Wollaston, as well as his generosity in donating a 'fair communion cup and a silver plate for the bread with a case in which to keep them'. He also sent 'the like to Trysull, both of which were freely bestowed upon the foresaid parishes'. In comparison with the fullness of this entry, the railing of the communion table in 1634 receives short shrift: 'In this year the communion table was new railed about, by the appointment of authority'.

Unlike Wolverhampton, the table remained a table.

Smart's ministry did not meet with whole-hearted acceptance locally. In 1636 William Mulliner was presented for resorting together with other company near to the church at sermon time with feathers in their hats, and 'with bells, drums, taber and pipe making so great a noise that the congregation should scarce hear what was delivered by the minister'.⁶⁵ Dimissed with a caution, such leniency may have been due to the hierarchy's lack of sympathy for Smart's Puritanism.⁶⁶

Wolverhampton lacked both a Puritan clerical and lay tradition. Furthermore, unlike Shrewsbury and Coventry, which possessed corporations with significant Puritan influence, Wolverhampton was divided into three manors, under the control of the interventionist Leveson family, who successfully fought off

⁶⁴ SP 16/388/41, II.

⁶⁵ LJRO, B/V/1/61.

⁶⁶ Further opposition to his ministry occurred in 1650, when one of the churchwardens, with two other men, pulled down the pulpit and reading desk that had been erected in 1633. S.R.O., Q/S.R.A., 1650/1, no.5.

various ecclesiastical challenges to their hegemony.⁶⁷ While Coventry possessed two parish churches, and Shrewsbury five, Wolverhampton's one church was under the aegis of the dean of Windsor. The Puritan survey of 1604 gave no indication of a resident preacher at St. Peter's, commenting instead on the parish's dissolute non-preaching stipendaries. The situation only changed with the arrival of Joseph Hall in 1610, and Richard Lee in the early 1620s. Lee's arrival appears to have been imposed on the town by the 'outsiders', Burton and Hall, with the support of London benefactors. It reveals the weakness of the Puritan cause in the town, in contrast, for example, to Doncaster in 1619, where the initiative to establish a lecture came from the corporation, and, more locally, to Kinver, where the Feoffees for Improvements were approached by the local inhabitants to supply them with a good preacher and schoolmaster.⁶⁸ Despite such inauspicious beginnings, Lee's ministry in Wolverhampton appears to have been effective enough to prompt the attention of Bishop Wright, who complained to Brent in 1635 that the town had been 'very faulty heretofore in harbouringe ... nonconformists', and, at least in part, to have been responsible for the opposition displayed locally to the Laudian innovations.⁶⁹

The local situation casts light on aspects of the historiographical debate. Tyacke has been criticised for identifying doctrinal practice with liturgical and disciplinary preferences, and erroneously seeing shifts in both as 'sweeping alterations' brought about by the Laudian ascendancy, but if this so, contemporaries were also guilty of the same mistake. Prynne, Burton and Baillie were all persuaded of the theological significance and innovatory nature of the dedication of the Wolverhampton altar, as were the local Puritans who broke into the church and removed the table into the nave. The altar policy of the Laudians, on their part, was the practical outworking of deeply held beliefs which were inimical to reformed

⁶⁷ Rowlands, '“Rome's Snaky Brood”', p.156.

⁶⁸ C.Cross, 'Religion in Doncaster from the Reformation to the Civil War', in P.Collinson and J.Craig (eds.), *The Reformation in English Towns* (Basingstoke, 1998) pp.48-63.

⁶⁹ SP 16/287/2.

Christianity- which, incidentally, explains Laud's distress at the desecration of the Lichfield altar.⁷⁰ Tarte's perception that Latham's disciplinary efforts were crypto-Catholic, and directed against good men and to the ruin of God's servants, was not uncommon amongst Puritans. That there had been a change of direction in what constituted orthodoxy is plainly illustrated in the case of Richard Lee. In 1623, Joseph Hall was happy to endorse his painful ministry. Twelve years later Laud, Wren, Dell, Brent and Latham saw him as averse to all good order and sought his immediate suspension.

Though Wolverhampton never became 'a godly commonwealth', there are indications of an effective reformed ministry, particularly after the advent of Richard Lee in the peculiar, Ithiel Smart in Wombourne and John Cross at Kinver. Their work was often supported by financial help from outside the area. In the 1630s the High Church party was successful in removing Lee and Atkins of Tipton, but other ministers continued in their charges. The evidence also suggests a network of clergy and laity who gave primary allegiance to their faith rather than their parish, as the case of William Pinson clearly shows. He was accused, by the High Commission, of irregular attendance at his parish church while living in Wolverhampton. Pinson replied that before he came to the town he would ordinarily visit his parish church (Kinver) but when resident in Wolverhampton he would attend St. Peter's, unless 'otherwise hindered', when 'Mr. Lee or some other preached there'. When there was no sermon at Wolverhampton, and Lee was preaching or catechising at Tettenhall, he went there. Since moving to Birmingham (in 1635) he attended the ministry of Francis Roberts at St. Martin's, except that when he and Mrs. Pinson were invited to 'dine at Wombourne on Sunday or Holy Days they have heard the sermon given by the minister of that place, or others that preached there on Sundays'.⁷¹

⁷⁰ See Lake, 'The Laudian Style', pp.161-186.

⁷¹ SP 16/388/41, III; Roberts was a Puritan, see Puritan Chapter, p.140.

The zeal with which Pinson pursued painful preachers, Smart secured his ministry at Wombourne and the godly in Wolverhampton responded to the imposition of Laudian sacramentalism and discipline denotes a growing commitment to the reformed faith in the locality, which was evidenced internally by a concern for personal godliness, and externally through mutual support and, if need be, by defiance of the ecclesiastical authorities.

CHAPTER 7

Arminianism and Conformity in the Diocese

Chapter six, on Wolverhampton, showed how Arminianism could prove divisive in a specific area. This chapter looks at the wider influence and impact of Arminianism (or Laudianism) in the diocese. It identifies a number of influential Arminians who sought to influence church practices, and shows that some of the most zealous held prominent positions within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It explores some of the controversies in which they were involved, particularly with regard to the metropolitan order of 1634 for the railing and repositioning of communion tables, and the case of Enoch ap Evan, the 'Shropshire Axe Murderer'.

The chapter will also address several aspects of recent historical controversy. Nicholas Tyacke has argued that Caroline ecclesiastical government in the 1630s marked a clear break with the Elizabethan and Jacobean past, with the Arminian hierarchy suppressing lectures, remodelling church interiors, outlawing Calvinism and attacking sabbatarianism. These innovations brought repression, confrontation and division to the Church. A number of historians are in general agreement with his assessment, including Peter Lake, Andrew Foster and Patrick Collinson, who declared Archbishop Laud 'the greatest calamity ever visited on the English Church'.¹ Other historians, such as Peter White, G.W. Bernard and Kevin Sharpe, have strongly disagreed, maintaining that the Church adopted and maintained a 'middle way'. According to Sharpe, for instance, Laud

¹ N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists* (Oxford, 1987); *idem*, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution', in C. Russell (ed.), *The Origins of the English Civil War* (Basingstoke 1973), pp. 119-143; P. Lake, 'The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s', in K. Fincham (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642* (Basingstoke, 1993), pp. 161-186; A. Foster, 'Church policies of the 1630's', in R. Cust and A. Hughes (eds.), *Conflict in the Early Stuart Church* (Harlow, 1989), pp. 193-223; P. Collinson, 'Episcopal Roles and Reputations' in *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 39-91.

strove for unity and peace, rather than division and discord, founded on his vision of the Church and commonweal as one community, the Church's uniformity ensuring her unity.² What light do developments within the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield throw on this controversy?

The Laudians held the Book of Common Prayer in high esteem, and demanded that its liturgy and rubric be observed to the letter. Yet the Prayer Book may have meant different things to different people. According to Christopher Haigh, its ritual was central to the lives of those 'Parish Anglicans' who were Catholics at heart, but had become 'church papists' after the Elizabethan Settlement. Neglected by the Catholic missionaries, they remained unprotestantised, centring their religion on the services of the Church and requiring obedience to its liturgy. According to Haigh, their demand for ritual was the parochial foundation on which the Caroline Church was built. Judith Maltby disagrees. She maintains that conformists believed they were worshipping God through obedience to the Prayer Book. Such people were not the spiritual leftovers of Catholicism, they felt a positive commitment to the Prayer Book, and were sometimes prepared to ensure its observation in full by resorting to the Church courts. Patrick Collinson has recently stated that by the early seventeenth century Protestantism had found a place in the 'gut-reactions of the masses'. The chapter looks at conformity within the diocese, and tries to establish whether it represents genuine commitment, passive acceptance, or indifference.³

² G.W.Bernard, 'The Church of England, c.1529-c.1642', *History*, 75 (1990), pp.183-206; P.White, 'The *via media* in the early Stuart Church', in Fincham (ed.), *Early Stuart Church*, pp.211-230; K. Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (Yale, 1993), pp.287-88.

³ C. Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics and the People', in *idem* (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Basingstoke, 1984), pp.195-219; J. Maltby, '“By this Book”: Parishioners, the Prayer Book and the Established Church', in Fincham (ed.), *Early Stuart Church*, pp.115-138; *idem*, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998); C.Marsh, *Popular religion in Sixteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 1998), p.216.

Arminian Diocesan Officials

We have looked at the episcopate of Bishop Wright, who was sympathetic to Arminianism but diluted its impact by his determination to protect his own interests, and by his ambivalent, conciliatory and often indolent approach. However, there was also a small group of senior diocesan officials, some of whom were appointed before Wright, who were considerably more zealous in furthering the Arminian/Laudian project. The group included Edward Latham, Official at Wolverhampton, Samuel Clarke, Archdeacon of Derby, William Jeffrey, Archdeacon of Salop, and Thomas Byrd, an ecclesiastical officer in the archdeaconry of Coventry.

Edward Latham was dean's official at Lichfield, a proctor, and surrogate at Wolverhampton.⁴ In 1635, he accompanied Archdeacon Jeffrey to Wolverhampton to dedicate the new altar. According to Prynne, Latham participated enthusiastically in the elaborate ceremony, during which the dignitaries wore richly 'broidered copes' they had brought with them from Lichfield.⁵ Latham's enthusiasm for the beauty of holiness is also evidenced by his role with regard to the altar at Lichfield and in his dealings with Lady Eleanor Davies. He was in part responsible for setting up the new altar fittings, and fearing Davies was about to perpetrate some action against them he ordered Susan Walker, who had taken the prophetess into her home, to remove her from her house.⁶ After Davies's attack on the altar and her later incarceration in Bedlam, Latham, anxious to pursue the case against Walker, sent articles against her and a fellow disciple, Marie Noble, to London in an attempt to have them disciplined. When these met with no response, he wrote to Sir John Lambe, Dean of the Court

⁴ W. Prynne, *Canterburies Doome* (London, 1645), pp. 380 f; PRO, SP 16/380/94. An Edward Latham, aged 39 (sic) was admitted *pensionieri* at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1631. The son of Anthony Latham, gent., of Derbyshire. He was 'probably LL. B. 1631'. J. Venn and J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1924), Part 1, vol. 3, p. 49.

⁵ Prynne, *Canterburies Doome*, p. 380; see chapter 6, pp. 227-228.

⁶ SP 16/380/94. Latham, with Twysden, the Chancellor and David Purie, a canon residentiary, ordered Walker 'to putt away the said Ladie Davies out of her house within the close of Lichfield for feare of wronginge the said Cathedral'.

of Arches, eager to provide him with the details of the case, either by letter, or in person.⁷

Zealous to impose innovations and apparently well-informed, Latham was keen to make himself useful to the Laudian hierarchy. Before Brent visited Wolverhampton on his metropolitan visitation in 1635, Laud (who was anxious to censure Lee, the Puritan prebend there) instructed him to speak to Latham, who, as surrogate, would provide information about Lee's 'aversion' to all good orders of the church.⁸ Latham's unpopularity with non-conformists is evidenced by a letter to him, as official at Wolverhampton, from Thomas Tarte, who had fled to America to escape his ecclesiastical discipline.⁹ Tarte saw him as the main pillar of 'babilon...the confused Rable of that popich hirachy', and as a new Bonner, a reference to the persecuting Marian bishop.¹⁰ If Puritans were suspicious of Laudians, however, the feeling was reciprocated. Prior to the Metropolitan Visitation, Bishop Wright had reported to Nathaniel Brent that he suspected Rowlandson, the official of the Peak peculiar of Bakewell, of favouring 'precisians'. Brent could prove nothing against Rowlandson, whom he found was 'voiced to be a very conformable man, and doth much protest against non conformitie'. Despite this, the dean and chapter removed Rowlandson as official of the peculiar, and replaced him with Latham.¹¹

There is some evidence that Latham and his co-religionists were more enthusiastic than Bishop Wright for the innovations of the 1630s.¹² Because of the size of the congregation at St. Michael's, Coventry, the re-positioned communion table was found to be impractical, and in 1636 Wright had given the mayor

⁷ SP 16/351/18.

⁸ Prynne *Canterburies Doome*, p.537.

⁹ SP 16/474/74.

¹⁰ Latham's unpopularity outlasted the collapse of Laudianism and being voted unfit for ministerial office by the Grand Committee for Religion in 1641. At the surrender of Bridgnorth Castle in 1646, he was the only prisoner not included in the term 'to be delivered to the mercy of Parliament'. A.G.Matthews (ed.), *Walker Revised* (Oxford, 1988), p.324.

¹¹ SP 16/387/2; R.Clark, 'Lists of Derbyshire Clergymen 1558-1662', *The Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, 104 (1984), p.39; chapter 3, pp.87,88,137,138.

¹² Chapter 5, p.209-210.

permission to order its removal into the body of the chancel during the communion.¹³ Fearing that Thomas Byrd, a Laudian official in the Archdeaconry of Coventry, would seek to have Wright's authorisation revoked, the mayor and corporation persuaded the Bishop to order Byrd to cease from 'troubling them or altering that'.¹⁴ Byrd informed Latham of Wright's decision, telling him that he did not know how such a move could be effected without great inconvenience to both minister and worshippers. It would have the effect of obscuring the table and the administration of the sacraments from the eyes and ears of the congregation. Byrd concluded his letter conspiratorially. Latham could make what use he could of it, provided he concealed the name of his informant.¹⁵ Latham passed the information to Sir John Lambe, much to Wright's fury, and the Bishop threatened him, Twysden, the Chancellor, and Jeffrey, the Archdeacon of Salop, with dire consequences.¹⁶ Unmoved, Latham told Lambe he was ready to justify himself in 'anie thinge I have done and whatsoever hath passed betwixt you and myself'. He sent Lambe a copy of Wright's article allowing the table to be brought into the chancel, a move which undermined all the pains the church had taken to comply with the original charge. Latham commented that if the Bishop sought to justify his actions by maintaining that the chancel steps were not fully finished, such a defence was inaccurate, because 'they were soe much upp at his being at Coventrie as that the[y] might well come upp and receive the holie Co[m]mun[ion]'.¹⁷

Byrd's and Latham's letters reveal a strong Arminian 'clique' within the diocesan hierarchy, which also included Jeffrey and possibly Twysden. They

¹³ SP 16/330/40. Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church* (Oxford, 1992), pp.234-5. This is not the only instance of Wright's 'non-doctrinaire' approach. In response to the request for money for the repair of St. Paul's, he wrote to Lambe that the citizens of Staffordshire saw little fruit in the adornment of the Cathedral. Instead, he spent the money on the church at Tutbury. SP 16/402/43.

¹⁴ SP 16/350/52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 'desiringe you to make what use you can of it, provided you ever conceale the name of your assured lovinge ffrind, Tho. Byrd'.

¹⁶ SP 16/351/18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

were far more zealous for the reforms than Bishop Wright, and prepared on occasion to appeal to higher authority than their Ordinary. Byrd's letter also suggests a tendency to disparage Wright amongst themselves. He concluded his note on the Bishop's actions in Coventry with the dismissive comment 'this is all [granting permission to have the table moved] except his sermon that his Lordship had done there'.¹⁸

William Jeffrey's involvement with the group indicates an enthusiasm for Laudian innovations which extended far beyond the confines of his archdeaconry of Salop, where he zealously imposed the railing of altars.¹⁹ In his archdeaconry the courts imposed fines for failure to comply within a specified time to the metropolitan order of 1634.²⁰ He also preached at the consecration of the altar at St. Peter's, Wolverhampton, in 1635. According to Prynne, 'all his whole sermon was to prove the truth of the altars. He had not one place out of canonical scriptures as we remember, and but one place in all, which was out of Maccabees'.²¹ Significantly, Jeffrey described the occasion as a 'renovation', as opposed to a dedication, regarding it as a renewal of a hallowed tradition. Prynne, and many other Puritans, saw the dedication as without New Testament warrant and a return to popish customs. Just as under the Old Covenant every altar was dedicated to God with special rituals and solemnities, so too Papists dedicated their altars, 'and thus was the altar of Wolverhampton Collegiate Church ... upon the 11th. day of October 1635, solemnly dedicated, after the popish manner, by Mr. Jeffries, Archdeacon of Salop and others'.²²

¹⁸ SP 16/350/52.

¹⁹ The information about Jeffrey in *Alumni Cantabrigienses* is questionable. According to Venn, Jeffreys received his M.A. from Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1625, was made Archdeacon of Salop in 1628, and Chancellor of Lichfield in 1630. This is surely too rapid a career advancement. From Latham's letter to Lambe of 1637, Charles Twysden was diocesan chancellor. See J.Venn and J.A.Venn (eds.), *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1923), part 1, vol.2, p.466.

²⁰ Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, pp.234-235. See SHRO, 760/1/77; 2959/4/1; 3848/CW/1. (These references are taken from Davies. I was not allowed access to the manuscripts because of their fragile condition).

²¹ W.Prynne, *A Quench-Coal, or a brief description in what place of the church or chancel the Lord's Table ought to be situated, especially when the sacrament is administered* (Amsterdam, 1637), pp.196-199.

²² *Ibid.*, p.69.

Samuel Clerke, archdeacon of Derby, was another enthusiastic innovator.²³ Clerke's 1630 visitation articles for the Archdeaconry of Derby are the earliest surviving example of an ordinary enquiring if communion tables had been placed at the east end of the chancel and railed. Fincham comments that although Clerke's activities as Archdeacon remain obscure, 'he was well-known as a vehement opponent of the Puritans in the Peterborough diocese' and that it may not be a coincidence that 'a similar entry next occurs in the Articles issued by Bishop Francis Dee for his primary visitation of 1634'.²⁴ His duties in Peterborough included conducting a survey with Richard Sibthorpe, which enquired if parishes had railed their altars, and whether the clergy administered communion at the rails to kneeling parishioners. When the churchwardens of All Saints', Northampton, refused to erect a rail, Clerke excommunicated them.²⁵ His actions within Northamptonshire were unpopular as a number of petitions sent to the House of Lords in the early 1640s testify.²⁶ The work undertaken with Sibthorpe was evidently a labour of love. In Derbyshire, his enthusiasm to press railing and for the related Order of 1634 is manifest in the number of presentments for failing to rail contained in the Derby *comperta* of 1636.²⁷ It is a measure of his success that three years later, there was only one reported instance of failure to rail

²³ Foster states that Clarke, the son of a yeoman from Warwick, matriculated from Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1600, gaining his M.A. in 1607, and his B.D and D.D. in 1616. He was Archdeacon of Derby from 1623, Foster refers to him as the 'eminent Puritan', confusing him with a namesake. Clarke died in March, 1641. J.Foster (ed.), *Alumni Oxonienses, 1500-1714* (Oxford, 1891).

²⁴ K.Fincham (ed.), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church II* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp.xix-xx.

²⁵ J.Fielding, 'Arminianism in the Localities: Peterborough Diocese, 1603-1642', in Fincham (ed.), *Early Stuart Church*, p.105; see chapter 5, pp.211,212.

²⁶ See *Fourth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London, 1874), Series 3, p.34, 1640, Dec.22. 'A petition of the churchwardens of Upton against Dr. Samuel Clarke, called upon to answer for sending one Pigeon to cut the altar table, place it altar-wise in the chancel and rail it in'. Clarke directed them to pay Pigeon for the work. They declined to do so and were excommunicated. The petition is followed by a draft order that 'Clarke shall make a new table for the chapel of Upton at his own cost and pay petitioners charges, or else appear to show cause of the contrary'. There are other petitions against Clarke from the churchwardens of All Saints, Northampton, concerning a communion table excommunication (see text above), Feb. 6th, 1641, p.47; and another one dated Feb. 9th, p.49.

²⁷ B/V/1/59; see chapter 5.

the communion table.²⁸ He also prohibited preaching on Sunday afternoons in the archdeaconry, observing the letter of the 1629 Injunctions by not even permitting sermons on catechetical subjects. Under him, ministers were restricted to a plain repetition of the catechism.²⁹

Arminians in the Parishes

Apart from the diocesan officials, a number of enthusiastic Arminian clergy can be found in the parishes. The records of the 1640s sometimes reveal clerical sacramentalism, in the face of Parliamentary proscription, indicating a loyalty to Laudianism which survived its collapse. William Higgins, rector of Stoke-on-Tern, Shropshire, in 1639, became Archdeacon of Derby after Samuel Clarke's death in 1641. His visitation articles for the archdeaconry reveal a tenacious concern for order and liturgical conformity, with a particular emphasis on respect for the political and ecclesiastical hierarchy, and evidence their author's sacramentalism. In the Interregnum he hid and preserved the *Book of St. Chad*, usually kept at Lichfield- an indication of his veneration for the devotional treasures of past ages.³⁰ John Hill was vicar of Ellastone, Staffordshire, from 1611 until his ejection in 1645. His Laudian practices brought him into inevitable conflict with the parliamentary authorities in the 1640s. A convinced sacramentalist, he placed the communion table altarwise and also continued to use the Prayer Book. In 1647 it was similarly reported of George Holmes, rector of Clowne and Breadsall since the 1630s, that 'before these times' he was very superstitious and bowed to the altar, rejecting one painful curate because he would

²⁸ See B/V/1/64, at Belper.

²⁹ See chapter 5. This was an extreme measure; even Peter Studley preached catechetical sermons.

³⁰ Higgins (1600-1666), vicar of Hentsridge, Somerset 1629-39, Almondbury, Gloucestershire 1631-2, and rector of Cheselbourne, Dorset 1632-1638, was made a canon at Lichfield in 1633 and Precentor there in 1636. J.Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, vol.ii, , p.707. See also chapter 8; Matthews, *Walker Revised*, p.305; W.Beresford, *Lichfield* (London,1883), p.147. According to Beresford, the *Book of St. Chad*, an Anglo-Saxon transcription of the gospels, had been kept at Lichfield since the time of Bishop Wynsy (964-973).

have 'no Puritan under him'. His allegiance to the Prayer Book and the sign of the cross survived later Parliamentary proscription.³¹ At Coventry, according to Darren Oldridge, 'the beneficed clergy proved flexible and pragmatic in the implementation of Laudian reforms', and received some support from the Corporation. William Panting, vicar of St. Michael's, from 1633 until his sequestration in 1643, used a cloth of gold, which had previously been draped round the pulpit on special occasions, to cover the communion table. The cloth was the property of the city treasury, and the Corporation donated it to the church, as 'a fit and convenient clothe to cover the communion table'.³²

One of the most influential Arminian parish clerics was Francis Holyoake (1567-1653). Born at North Whitacre, Warwickshire, he was educated at Queen's College, Oxford, and instituted rector of Southam in 1604, succeeding John Oxenbridge, the Puritan.³³ Unlike his predecessor, Holyoake was a conformist, and later a supporter of the innovations of the 1630s. Ann Hughes has described him as 'the leading Arminian minister in the county'.³⁴ In 1610 he preached *A Sermon of Obedience, Especially unto Authority Ecclesiastical*, at the archidiaconal visitation at Coventry.³⁵ Maintaining that those who held too exalted expectations of the ministry were more dangerous than others who attacked all ministers, the sermon castigated Puritan critics who referred to non-preaching ministers as 'dumb dogs'. Holyoake denied that the ability to preach was an essential characteristic of the ministry, maintaining that the plain reading of the homilies was perfectly acceptable to God. The efficacy of the sacrament was not dependent on the character of the minister, while the Church's traditions were an admixture of human and divine elements, 'part of that order and decorum

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.323; Bodleian Library, Walker MS., C 5 52-56; Clarke, 'Derbyshire Clergymen', p.57-8.

³² D. Oldridge, 'Conflict within the Established Church in Warwickshire, c.1603-1642' (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1992), pp.254,258; City of Coventry Record Office, A14a, f 323 v.

³³ *DNB*

³⁴ A. Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire* (Cambridge, 1987), p.67.

³⁵ F. Holyoake, *A Sermon of Obedience, Especially unto Authoritie Ecclesiastical, wherein the principle controversies of our church are handled, and many of their objections which are refractory to the Government established* (Oxford, 1610). The sermon was preached at the Visitation of William Hinton, the Archdeacon.

that God hath commanded in general, leaving the particulars to the discretion of the church', and he urged uniformity and conformity to ecclesiastical practices.

According to Archdeacon Hinton, the sermon was badly received by Puritan auditors in Coventry, who criticised it as worse than heresy or treason.³⁶

Holyoake's anti-Puritan views also found expression in his edition of Rider's Latin dictionary, which he published in 1633 as the *Dictionarium Etymologicum Latinum*. He 'translated' *praedestinatiani* as 'a kinde of Heretiques that held fatal predestination of every particular matter, person or action, and that all thinges come to passe and fell out necessarily; especially touching the salvation and damnation of particular men'. The work was dedicated to Laud.³⁷

There is further evidence of Holyoake's sympathies in the churchwardens' accounts at Southam. The 'book of recreacons' was purchased for 6d. in 1633, and in response to the Metropolitan Order of 1634 £3 8s. 4d. was paid 'to John Perse the Joyner for the Communion table and for the fence or frame about the same'. The parish gave money towards the restoration of St. Paul's Cathedral and rang the church bells in loyal commemoration of the 'Kings crownation'. Unlike the Puritan parish of Holy Trinity, Dorchester, where by the later 1630s, there were no further payments to bell ringers for commemorating Charles's accession until the end of the decade, at Southam the practice continued.³⁸ By 1635, Southam possessed two surplices, whereas some parishes did not even have one. £2 14s. 2d. was paid to 'Mr. Harslop for holland to make the new surplis and for purple lace for the collar of it'. The ostentatious collar is a very unusual feature. A further 5s. was paid for the garment to be made.³⁹

³⁶ Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, pp.68,80.

³⁷ F. Holyoake (ed.), *Dictionarium Etymologicum Latinum* (London, 1633). The use of the past tense may be pejorative, i.e., this is an 'uncouth' belief that is not fittingly held by contemporaries. Holyoake was well aware that belief in the doctrine of double predestination was still current.

³⁸ WRO DR 50/9, see entries for 1636 and 1638; D.Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells* (Berkeley, 1989), pp.59-63.

³⁹ WRO, DR 50/9. The Southam surplice was very expensive, even in comparison with the £1 19s. 6d. that was paid for one by the churchwardens at Eccleshall (a peculiar of the bishop, and the site of the episcopal palace). W.S.L. 236/27.

At Coventry, Samuel Buggs, vicar of St. Michael's from 1623, and of Holy Trinity three years later, also viewed the rites of the established Church as essential to religious order and decency, and emphasised the necessity of discipline. He condemned Puritans as 'stiffe-necked or stiffe-hammed' schismatics, and regarded unauthorised fasting as vanity and hypocrisy, barring Samuel Clarke, the Puritan, from preaching in either of his pulpits. When Clarke later preached at St. John's, Bablake, Buggs sent spies who brought back evidence of his non-conformity, which Buggs used to present Clarke to Bishop Morton. In 1633 Buggs, with the agreement of the Corporation, successfully ensured that non-conformists were prevented from becoming lecturers at Coventry. He died in the same year.⁴⁰

Peter Studley and Anti-Puritanism in Shrewsbury

Buggs's anti-Puritan drive at Coventry is comparable to that undertaken by Peter Studley, the vicar of St. Chad's, Shrewsbury. Born in Shropshire in 1588, Studley was educated at Gloucester Hall, Oxford and matriculated at the age of twenty-two in 1610, receiving his M.A. in 1617. Foster dates his ministry at St. Chad's from 1628, but he was an active incumbent some years prior to this.⁴¹ He later claimed he had been fighting Puritanism in Shrewsbury since 1620. The campaign gathered momentum over the years, and by the 1630s the *comperta* reveal a multitude of presentments for non-conformity.⁴² He was presented to a

⁴⁰ Oldridge, 'Conflict in Warwickshire', pp.249-253.

⁴¹ J.Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses* (Oxford, 1891), vol ii, p.1440.

⁴² P. Lake, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and a Shropshire Axe-Murderer', *Midland History*, 15 (1990), pp. 37-64. The *comperta* for St. Chad's show a growing concern to combat Puritanism. The presentments of 1620 (B/V/1/39) deal with drink-related offences and absence from public worship; those of 1626, which are signed by Peter Studley, 'minister' (/1/48) contained a list of those who refused to be churched after childbirth, amongst whom was the wife of the future separatist, Daniel Childlowe, and a 'tentative' presentment of George Wright and William Rowley for holding religious meetings in their homes. Studley was not sure if this meeting could be termed a 'conventicle'. He left the decision to the discretion of the court. In the changed ecclesiastical circumstances of the 1630s he allowed his anti-Puritanism fuller rein, as the presentments of 1633 show. See below.

living in the diocese of Hereford in 1636, leaving Shrewsbury in the following year, and died in 1648.

Peter Studley published *The Looking-Glasse of Schism* in 1634, as part of his crusade against Puritanism and as a cautionary tale of its intrinsic evils.⁴³ In three sections, the work deals with the case of Enoch ap Evan, the Shropshire axe-murderer; the current state of the church, which Studley saw as encouraging Puritanism by default; and a recent incident in Shrewsbury, which, he believed, showed the schismatical nature of Puritanism and the need for greater discipline. Studley's work was a catch-all pamphlet; at once a popular and sophisticated attack on local and national Puritanism, which, in line with contemporary Arminian works, it sought to ostracise from the mainstream of English Protestantism.

Enoch ap Evan had lived at Clun with his parents and brother. The family of small-holders was religious, with home devotions held twice a day, the prayers being read consecutively by Enoch and his brother John, and regular attendance at church.⁴⁴ According to Studley, Enoch became an enthusiast, looking for more than attendance at church on Sundays and holy days. 'He busily harkened after week-day Lectures, and would often ride 3 or 4 miles to heare sermons', which was 'the ordinary practice of this formal age' - an appropriation by Studley of a pejorative phrase usually associated with the Puritan criticism of formal religion. Evan managed to convince himself that he was of the elect, and after about two years 'began to distaste some ordinances for the Laudable and uniforme regiment of God's people', such as the superiority of government by bishops and the sign of the cross in baptism. He came to believe that kneeling at Communion was idolatrous and rendered the communicant incapable of spiritual nourishment. Arguing one day with his brother over the appropriate posture when

⁴³ P.Studley, *The Lookinge-glasse of schisme, wherein by a narration of the murders done by Enoch ap Evan, a downe-right Separatist, on his mother and brother, the disobedience of that sect is set forth*, first edition 1634; second edition, *enlarged and corrected together with an answer to certaine criminations against this historie*, 1635.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.22-3.

communicating, he became enraged at being contradicted and, grabbing an axe, murdered him and his mother too. Taken to Shrewsbury and sentenced to be hanged, he was visited and counselled by Studley during his incarceration, who found him confused and guilty of spiritual pride, which was the ‘fault of all [his] sect’. According to Studley, the local Puritans were greatly displeased when he visited ap Evan.⁴⁵ They attributed the murders to mental imbalance, of which, they alleged, Enoch had previously given evidence. Studley repudiated this from the testimony of ap Evan and others. Despite his counsel, Enoch gave insufficient evidence of repentance. He was hanged, and his body ordered to be kept at the place of execution in an iron cage. Two weeks later it was stolen. Studley was at pains to show that ap Evan was not the holder of Anabaptist views ‘or any other odde secte whatsoever, but only a silly, ignorant and downe-right English Puritan’.⁴⁶

The work sought to exclude non-conforming Puritans from the visible church as surely as they endeavoured to exclude the unregenerate from the invisible one. It proclaimed that ap Evan was not an enthusiast, but just a Puritan, the murders being a direct outcome of his theological beliefs. He strove to outlaw Puritanism and show it to be against nature. He ‘exposed’ the model of experiential and experimental religion and replaced it with the decency and order of Prayer Book religion. There was little room for accommodation in Studley’s outlook: no middle ground by which those of uneasy conscience could be accommodated within the Church. This is also illustrated in the 1633 churchwardens’ presentments for St. Chad’s Shrewsbury, the church of which he was the minister.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.96. One of them referred to him as ‘a great and ungodly wit [who has] come to this man of purpose to discredit our party, and will work him to his own will:and godly persons shall thereby sustaine disgrace, by the unnatural crueltie and wickednesse of this bloudie man’.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.121.

⁴⁷ B/V/1/53, pp.9,10,11,13; see chapter 3, pp. 128,132,133. The St. Chad’s churchwardens also presented seven parishioners who made ‘a schisme or division between the use of public prayer and preaching’ by attending the service only at the time of the sermon.

According to Studley, he had spent thirteen years attempting to reclaim Puritan Salopians from their 'wandering fancies'. He maintained that the town acted as a magnet to all classes of non-conformists, those from the lower sort managing to escape being presented to the church courts. Part of the problem was the need for the clergy to be better paid (a complaint on which Puritans and Laudians met on common ground). Clerical poverty encouraged non-conformity, for which he blamed both the clergy and wealthy landowners.⁴⁸ The remedy lay in part with 'a legal provision of encouraging maintenance for an able ministry'.⁴⁹ It was a great injustice that farmers paid tithes, while merchants and wealthy townsfolk gave nothing for the upkeep of the ministry. He asked that the 'London practice' be adopted in other towns; this might not amount to much, 'yet it had preserved them [ministers] from that Relation, Dependence and subjection under the richer sort of Men, which (everywhere) in the Land they are constrained to give: and by means thereof, schisme, and breach of unity is fostered and dilated'.⁵⁰

Studley claimed that Puritan gentry forced their tenants into preciseness, a type of seigneurial non-conformity similar to the influence that Bossy found the Catholic gentry exercised over its dependants.⁵¹ Furthermore, he complained that non-conformist 'great ones', both in Shrewsbury and elsewhere, countenanced 'this modern invention of non-subjection to lawfull authority and thereby

⁴⁸ By insinuating themselves into the hearts of the people by a sly opinion which flatters and deludes the hearers, and having raised the structure of a 'Babylonian Tower', clerics are admitted into the homes of wealthy Christian families who wish to be known as religious. Here they fare sumptuously, while their patrons think themselves especially favoured of God. Studley comments that 'for all things in the world hunger and fasting least consorts with these men's dispositions', they are Chadbands 'who are present at and partake of more good feasts and plentiful feedings than any kind of men in the land besides'. Studley, *Looking-glasse of schisme*, pp.202-214.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.224.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.235. This presumably refers to the London practice of an ecclesiastical rent charge in lieu of offerings due to the Church. By the seventeenth century the situation in the capital was not ideal, Heylyn declaring that the full rate (2/9d in the pound) was avoided by 'general fraud'. When he became archbishop, Laud attempted to improve the situation, and by 1638 (after considerable controversy between the Church and the City) there was some increase in the Church's income. At Norwich, Dover, York and Ipswich attempts were also made to establish the London practice. C.Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church* (Oxford, 1956), pp.275-288.

⁵¹ For seigneurial Catholicism, see J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, 1975), pp.168-181.

incourage poore ministers to disobey their Prince by resisting his lawes'.⁵²

Schism, he claimed, was the bane and subversion of the church and the nation.

Drawing a parallel between clerical and lay non-conformists and the prodigal son, he declared they were wanton and prodigal fugitives from both their spiritual and political fathers (God and the King). Only by 'some few gentle stripes of the Rod of Princely power' would their eyes be opened to their 'sullen pride and vanity', leading them to return to 'their God, to their Prince, to themselves'.⁵³ He believed the zeal of Shrewsbury non-conformists was beginning to ebb, and that the proper application of authority would ensure that they returned to the fold. He hoped that Bishop Wright would exercise this authority, for 'untill the rod of power and discipline bee imposed gently for your correction: your affections will stray from that regularity of obedience'.⁵⁴

Studley's religion bore the marks of Laudianism. It emphasised the purity and orthodoxy of the established Church, under the guidance of wise and pious bishops. He insisted that services were to be conducted exactly according to the liturgy and rubric of the Book of Common Prayer. Family prayer was also to be regulated by the Prayer Book. He commended the ill-fated ap Evan family for using the liturgy, rather than extemporising prayers 'conceived in their owne heartes, by the private motions of the Spirit (the reigning practice of this age)'.⁵⁵ Piety was mediated through the beauty of holiness, which included bowing and kneeling as directed by the rubric.

Studley regarded the spiritual devotions of the godly, and their doubts over ceremonies, as evidence of spiritual pride. He told ap Evan that this was:

The fault of all your sect: for no sooner doe any of you begin to look toward Sion: and in your own conceits to relish the things of God: but as instantly you so over-value your owne small worthes; that all the learning and piety

⁵² Studley, *Lookinge-glasse of schisme*, p.238.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.262-3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.300.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.22-3.

in the kingdome, is not able to equall your petty devotions either for soundnesse of judgment, truth of faith, or all uprightness of walking. No doubt but wee should have a jolly church if you and your conceited companions had the new moulding and rectifying of it.⁵⁶

Studley's Laudian respect for religious traditions and artefacts is also demonstrated by his account of a rigid Tewkesbury Puritan who had sacrilegiously removed a stone cross. Providential judgment followed when the Puritan's next two children were born lame and deaf 'and deformed by monstrosity of body'. Not suspecting that this was a judgment for his own disobedience and profanity, the man took stones from the former cross and made a swine trough with them. The outcome was immediate and terrible. The swine died as soon as they ate out of it, and the Puritan, realizing God's wrath, and overcome by the terrors of a wounded conscience, 'leapt into a draw-well in the court of a neighbour, and was taken up bruised and drowned'. The account confirms Alexandra Walsham's contention that providentialism was not confined to the Puritans alone.

Studley saw himself as fighting a crusade. One of the purposes of his book, as Peter Lake has stressed, was to present himself as the 'known anti-Puritan of the county', 'fighting a long struggle for thirteen years against the Puritans of Shrewsbury' - a struggle which, he confessed, had not been successful.⁵⁷ He 'took the social energy, the interest, shock and titillation generated by the ap Evan murders' and attempted to shape it 'into a coherently anti-Puritan force, scapegoating the Puritans by creating an image of them as factious, divisive, potentially mad rebels just like Enoch'.⁵⁸ His antipathy was reciprocated. Puritans in the town and vicinity were greatly displeased by his visits to ap Evan. Studley reported that one of them, 'no honest man I warrant you, said of me, He is a great and ungodly wit and comes to this man of purpose

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.77.

⁵⁷ Lake, 'Shropshire Axe-Murderer', p.44.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.54.

to discredit our party, and will work him to his own will: and godly persons shall thereby sustain disgrace by the unnatural crueltie and wickedness of this bloudie man'. Studley commented, 'this report I heard and digested it with silence and patience, being by many years residence here inured to their bitterness of spirit and frequent railings'.⁵⁹

The work was an attempt to encourage the Arminian leadership in suppressing Puritanism and bringing greater uniformity to the Church. It achieved its aim locally, convincing Bishop Lindsell, the Laudian Bishop of Hereford, of the need to reform the Bishops Castle lectures along Laudian lines.⁶⁰ The Puritan faction was also hindered from responding. Richard More, a Shropshire J.P., wrote a reply arguing that Evan was out of his mind, rather than a genuine Puritan, and that the Bishops Castle area was in any case free of Puritanism and non-conformity.⁶¹ Despite More's protestations of conformity, Laud's chaplain refused to license his work. Nothing was to be allowed to undermine the propaganda value of Studley's pamphlet. The authorities were probably also aware that, in his personal claims, More was being disingenuous. He had links with Sir Robert Harley, participated in days of private fasting and prayer at Harley's home at Brompton Bryan and helped non-conformist ministers in trouble with the authorities. Clearly he and Studley differed markedly in their definition of 'Puritanism'. Their contention reveals the growing fissure within the Church.⁶²

Studley saw himself as in the vanguard of orthodoxy and order against the Puritans. His divisive approach marked a radical shift in its ecclesiology and the focus of its polemic, all the more striking because the initiative came not from a bishop but a member of the parochial clergy. Local anti-Puritanism could be very

⁵⁹ Studley, *Looking-glasse of schisme*, p.96.

⁶⁰ Richard More, *A True Relation of the murders committed in the parish of Clune in the county of Salop by Enoch ap Evans* (London, 1641), p.60.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; Lake, 'Shropshire Axe-Murderer', p.56.

⁶² As well as refuting Studley's pamphlet, More was not above ridiculing a perceived theological inconsistency. Studley's claim that the children of the Tewkesbury Puritan were disabled as part of God's judgment for their father's sacrilege prompted the comment, 'we see this known Antipuritan knoweth the secret cause of God's judgements'. More, *A True Relation*, p.112; Lake, 'Shropshire Axe Murderer', pp.57-58.

destabilising, especially, as Lake stresses, when it could canvass the aid of an ascendant Laudianism in its crusade against a local Puritan clique.⁶³

Studley opposed the ministry of Julines Herring, the non-conformist lecturer at St. Alkmunds and was the instigator of attempts to report his non-conformity.⁶⁴ He used his pulpit to denounce Puritanism. In 1636, he became rector of Pontesbury, in the diocese of Hereford, and vacated his charge in Shrewbury in the following year. Members of the Corporation showed their sympathy with the Puritan cause by attempting to fill the position with a painful preacher, Richard Poole. They were thwarted in their efforts by the King, who appointed a conformable divine to supply the vacancy.⁶⁵

Lay Arminianism

Arminianism was not wholly a clerical phenomenon, though the evidence for lay religious support is limited and difficult to interpret. The most elevated sympathiser in the diocese was probably Alice, Lady Dudley, daughter of Sir Thomas Leigh, of Stoneleigh Abbey. Married to Robert Dudley, self-styled Earl of Leicester, in 1596, she spent her married years at Kenilworth Castle, and after her separation in 1605 she lived for the greater part of her life at Dudley House in London, until her death in 1668. She gave very generously to the reconstruction of St. Giles Church, London (1623-1631), and when the building was completed, presented furnishings for the upper part of the chancel, cloths and cushions for the altar, a 'large Turkey carpet, to be spread on the week days over it' and 'very costly rails to guard the Altar or Lord's Table from profane abuses'. According to her earliest biographer, Dr. Boreman, she also gave 'the communion Plate of all

⁶³ Lake, 'Shropshire Axe-Murderer', pp. 55-56.

⁶⁴ S. Clarke, *A General Martyrology* (London, 1677), p.161. Clarke claimed that Studley was the ring-leader of the anti-Herring faction in the town, and stirred up complaints against him as a non-conformist.

⁶⁵ See chapter 5, p.213.

sorts, in silver or gilt for that sacred use'.⁶⁶ She remained loyal to her High Church principles even during the civil wars, and despite smears of being a papist or 'something like one'.⁶⁷ Lady Dudley's enthusiasm to beautify 'altar worship' in her native county and elsewhere is evidenced by the eleven services of plate she bestowed, some to churches on her estates. Seven were presented before 1640, six of them to parishes in the archdeaconry of Coventry. (Ladbroke and Monks Kirby in 1623, Ashow, Kenilworth and Leek Wooton in 1638 and Stoneleigh).⁶⁸ She also gave £20 p.a., and sometimes a greater amount, for a perpetual augmentation to six vicarages.⁶⁹ Lady Dudley's enthusiasm for the 'beauty of holiness' and Laudian worship is undeniable. However, her influence in the diocese was much less than if she had lived in the area, and gathered round her clergy zealous for the Laudian cause. Her daughter Frances was similarly benevolent. She married Sir Gilbert Knyveton of Bradley, Derbyshire, and in 1640 gave silver-gilt chalices with paten-covers and flagons to the churches on her husband's estate.⁷⁰

One of the most prominent lay Arminians of the period was Sir Richard Dyott (d.1660), who sat in all the Parliaments in the 1620s as M.P. for Lichfield. Strongly anti-Puritan, he had graduated in 1607 from Corpus Christi College, Oxford, the *alma mater* of a number of Arminian divines, including Thomas Jackson, Gabriel Bridges and Henry Mason.⁷¹ Dyott's Arminian sympathies are clear from his role in parliamentary debates. In July 1625, he claimed that Montagu's doctrine was 'popular and common and not yet condemned by the Church of England'. In 1626 he was sequestered from the Commons for criticizing proceedings against Buckingham, and was an apologist for him in the

⁶⁶ F.L. Colville, *The Worthies of Warwickshire* (Warwick, 1869), pp.236-248; R. Boreman, *A Mirror of Christianity and a Miracle of Charity, a True and Exact narrative of the Life and Death of Alice, Duchess of Duddeley* (London, 1669).

⁶⁷ Boreman, *Mirror of Christianity*, p.12.

⁶⁸ C. Oman, *English Church Plate, 597-1830* (London, 1957), pp.147-8.

⁶⁹ Colville, *Worthies of Warwickshire*, pp. 242-248. The vicarages were Manceter, Monks Kirby, Ashow, Kenilworth, Leek Wooton and Stoneleigh.

⁷⁰ Oman, *English Church Plate*, p.148. Those surviving are at Bradley, Kirk Langley, Kniveton, Mugginton and Osmaston-by-Ashbourne.

⁷¹ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp.64-67. Mason was chaplain at Corpus Christi, 1602-1611, and, in 1633, joint author of *God's Love to Mankind*, an Arminian work about universal grace.

1628 Parliament.⁷² After the death of his father in 1622, Dyott concentrated on his legal and political career; appointed to the Council of the North in 1630 and knighted in 1635, he helped to organise the defence of Lichfield for the King in 1642. Amongst his papers is a note-book on law and philosophy, in Latin and English. Dyott filled the space that was left with further jottings on law and history, and with scandalous or humorous anecdotes. Some of his reflections have a decidedly anti-Puritan ring, as in his account of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart:

God is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh himself to have hardened it...God by withholding, in justice, his grace from Pharaoh, whoe had offended him by contempt of his divine majestie and oppression of his people, in despite of his commandment; Pharaoh by reiteration and continuance of his sins, until his heart was obdurate. See what plagues God sent, and at the prayer of Moses removed and yet relapsed or persisted.⁷³

Tyacke believes this passage 'may well derive from [Thomas] Jackson'.⁷⁴ It shows God withholding grace in response to Pharaoh's initial contempt, a denial of the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination, which holds that God's election is the effective cause of all reactions to Him.

Dyott was a staunch champion of episcopal claims. He criticised the Puritan Sir William Ellis, for claiming that the translators of the Authorised Version, 'to gain some reputation of antiquity to Byshops', had inserted the word into the twentieth verse of the first chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles*. Whereas the older translation had rendered the passage as 'Let another take his charge', the 1611 Bible had substituted the latter word with 'bishopricke'. Ellis had claimed that this was inappropriate and 'exposeth to scorne who they intended to honour'. Dyott commented, 'but the old latin translacon was soe likewise'. His observation

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 140,142; M.F.Keeler *et al.*, *Commons Debates 1628* (Yale,1978), vol.iv, p.268.

⁷³ SRO, MS D661/11/1/7.

⁷⁴ Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.142.

reveals his support for bishops, and his esteem for the Vulgate as a historically valid translation, in contrast to the Puritans, who saw it as a corrupted version of the Bible.

Some of Dyott's stories openly ridicule Puritanism. For instance: 'A Puritan going to buy cheese at a chandlers was bid to taste it, he went to raise his eyes to give thanks, nay by god s[ai]d the Chandler if you meane to make a meale of it, to the devle with you'. He also poked fun at the Puritan dogma that the Pope was the Anti-Christ. He noted that 'the vicar of Lapley told Mr. Brooke [that] it was reported [that] t[he] Pope was turned Protestant (when he adhered to t[he] ffrench ag[ains]t the Spanish). Mr. Brooke ans[wered] I am glad of it. Why for s[ai]d t[he] vicar? Because then there will be a Protestant Antichrist'.⁷⁵

For evidence of Laudian sympathies among ordinary parishioners in the 1630s, we are largely dependent on churchwardens' presentments in response to visitation articles that reflect the Laudian innovations. These throw light on the Laudian impact at parish level, and sometimes offer clues to local sympathies, though it is often difficult to know if the churchwardens supported the new policies or were simply responding conscientiously. In 1635, at Alfreton, Derbyshire, the churchwardens spoke to the congregation after a Sunday service, entreating them 'that they would be reformed and doe there duties in the church w[hi]ch they formerly had omitted, vide standinge at the beleefe and loweringe the knee with obeisance at the name of Jesus in the gospell & not to take the sacrament in anie other gesture than kneeling'.⁷⁶ In 1636, at Polesworth, Warwickshire, the wardens of the previous year were presented for not providing a 'sufficient co[m]mun]ion table and a raile as it is required'.⁷⁷ Sometimes there is a hint that churchwardens were motivated by more than duty in reporting offenders, in that the language used in the presentment alludes to the Laudian

⁷⁵ SRO, MS D661/11/1/7. Brooke, who owned the advowson of Lapley, was a recusant. See chapter 4, pp.149-150.

⁷⁶ LJRO, B/C/5, Alfreton 1636/1638. Cause paper.

⁷⁷ B/V/1/58, p.49.

concept of the 'beauty of holiness'. In 1636, at Barrow, in Derbyshire, the impropiator, Sir John Harpur was presented because the chancel was not 'beautified'.⁷⁸ A similar presentment is found at Mellor, in the same year, where both fixtures and fittings were a cause for concern. The church lacked a cushion for the pulpit and a carpet or linen cloth for the communion table, and the 'church walls [were] not beautified [and] the seates not uniforme nor decent'.⁷⁹ A list of faults from Osmaston included the presentment of John Twigge, junior, 'for writing upon the Co[mmun]ion table', signalling that this was felt to be an irreverent action. Such indications of 'parish Laudianisms' are rare, and it is probably no coincidence that all these examples are taken from Derbyshire, where the Archdeacon, Samuel Clerke, was an enthusiastic Arminian.

The Impact of Arminianism

How much did Arminianism achieve within the diocese? It was enthusiastically implemented by the senior diocesan officials, Clarke, Jeffrey, Latham and Byrd, who used their influence and authority to push for reforms in the 'beauty of holiness', and had recourse to the church courts to discipline non-conformists. Arminianism also met with some clerical support from such figures as Holyoake, and Buggs and Studley, both of whom, embracing strict conformity, engaged in energetic anti-Puritan campaigns. The railing of communion tables, supported by the Bishop and the hierarchy, appears to have been widely implemented. An example of the types of reform given priority, and the spirit in which they were sometimes pressed, is found in an unattributed note in the Staffordshire Epiphany sessions of 1634/5:

⁷⁸ B/V/1/59, p.5. This was not a common description. At Heynor (p.20) and Newton Sowney (p.39), for example, the chancel was described as being 'in decay'. At Swarkeston (p.39), another impropiation of Harpur's, there were 'defects in the chauncel'. Bishop Wright's articles do not contain the word, so it is possible that its use is an indication of Laudian sympathies on the part of the churchwardens. Fincham, *Visitation Articles*, vol.ii, pp.56-73.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.112.

This is to let you understand that all parents to children and governours of servants shall both for your parts and they for their parts amend the greates abuseis that have binn made in our Curch as they and you shall answer it accordinge to our othes and books of articles[.] there is inqueery made by our wright reverant lord bishopp to know whether your hie aulter be made according to the time set you by the officiall [and in] noe indecent manner and forme accordinge as you shall answer it at your perrill.⁸⁰

Several clerics associated with Arminianism, such as Jeffrey, Clarke, Holyoake, Buggs and Studley, were appointed before Wright became bishop, and were clearly driven by their own ideals, not simply responding to him or Laud. More Laudian than their Bishop, they were prepared, at times, to by-pass their Ordinary. Laud's eminence and help enabled them to pursue their own goals more effectively.

Nevertheless, there were hindrances to Laudianism's success. Bishop Wright's approach was often pragmatic rather than doctrinaire, and his effectiveness was impaired by his lack of drive. Puritanism proved resilient to Arminian attempts to uproot it. Studley was right to see himself as engaged in a lengthy and difficult campaign. Despite the efforts of Buggs and Panting at Coventry, aided by a Corporation in which Puritans had lost the ascendancy, the 1640s were to show that this was only a temporary state of affairs. The influence of such figures as Alice, Lady Dudley, Sir Richard Dyott and Francis Holyoake was relatively limited. Lady Dudley lived outside the see, Dyott was deprived of his parliamentary platform during the 1630s, and Holyoake's influence was largely confined to his parochial charge in rural south Warwickshire.

Where Arminianism was canvassed it was to prove divisive, amongst the clergy and laity alike. Non-conformist ministers, some of whom had previously been encouraged by members of the old hierarchy, were suspended. The Puritan laity found their relative liberty circumscribed, and towns such as Shrewsbury and

⁸⁰ SRO, Q/SR/217, Epiphany 1634/5, f.29.

Wolverhampton were eloquent testimony to the divisions that Laudianism could cause. Even the conforming members of the laity from Shropshire and Staffordshire, who presented petitions to the Lords in 1641 for the retention of the Prayer Book and episcopate, looked back with affection to the pre-Laudian Church. Of the leading Arminians in the diocese, Studley had, on his own reckoning, many opponents in Shrewsbury, while Latham was voted unfit for ministerial office in 1641, and Clarke was the subject of complaints to the House of Lords. Laudianism in the diocese had proved divisive and unpopular. Its leading proponents stirred up strife and dissension. With the collapse of the Personal Rule, their careers promptly foundered.

Conformity and Prayer Book Protestantism

The liturgy and rubric of the Book of Common Prayer were, of course, central to the worship of the established Church as a whole, not only its Laudian wing. What can we know of the conforming masses? Were they largely unreformed, centring their religion on the ritual the Church provided, as Haigh suggests, believers who venerated the Prayer Book but disliked Laudianism, as Maltby has maintained or, as Collinson argues, genuine Protestants?⁸¹ Is conformity an indication of genuine commitment, passive acceptance, or indifference?

It is an impossible task to read the minds of the silent majority. The most suggestive evidence that a significant number of parishioners became positively committed to the full worship of the established Church comes from churchwardens' presentments of ministers who fell short, either through laxity or Puritan scruples. Such evidence is not without its problems. Wardens were responding to questions from higher officials, and may have responded from fear or a sense of duty, rather than from personal conviction. However, they were

⁸¹ See above, p.243.

often prepared to ignore faults, unless such a course of (in)action ran counter to the majority view in the parish, so we can probably assume that in many cases presentments represent a genuine sense of resentment on the part of a significant number of parishioners.⁸²

A significant number of parishioners looked to the Church to provide them with the liturgy as lawfully prescribed. Presentments were usually made by the churchwardens or the minister, but there are indications that a desire for the authorised form of worship was more broadly based. Parishioners had a legal right to the services of the Church, and when those in immediate authority failed to provide a minister they often reported the guilty party. In 1605, the inhabitants of Ashbourne brought their minister, Thomas Peacocke, before the church court for neglecting to maintain a curate at the chapel at Hognaston.⁸³ In 1636, parishioners accused John Hill, rector of Chellaston, Derbyshire, with 'noe holy dayes nor fasting dayes but 5th of November bidden for this many yeares; notorious offenders received to the co[m]mun[i]on; the minister hath bin no[n]e Resident 12 yeares and the cure insufficiently served, that never or seldome any divine service read'. There had been no perambulation 'within the memory of man'. According to the churchwardens 'the living is very sufficient and Mr. Hill hath for many yeares received the fleece and starved the flocke'.⁸⁴ Parishioners expected to have a minister who would provide the statutory services and read according to the Book, in an audible manner. The minister's pew, at Fillongley in

⁸² This interpretation parallels Keith Wrightson's two concepts of order. Wrightson maintains that the ideal concept of order held by the governing magistracy of seventeenth century England, a positive aspiration towards a national condition of disciplined social harmony, differed from that of the parochial community which saw order as little more than conformity to fairly malleable local customs, a negative absence of disruptive conflict. Statutory proscription of local customs resulted in a popular reluctance to enforce the law where it ran counter to local needs. K. Wrightson, 'Two concepts of order: justices, constables and jurymen in seventeenth-century England', in J. Brewer and J. Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People. The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New Brunswick, 1980), pp.21-46. Similarly archbishops, bishops and archdeacons had their 'top-down' agendas, whether Calvinist or Arminian, which presentments, in some part, reflected; but the presentments also endorsed what local congregations thought important.

⁸³ LJRO, B/C/5, 1605, Ashbourne. Peacocke, in defence, argued that he was not 'bounde by lawe to mayntaine any such there'.

⁸⁴ LJRO, B/V/1/59, p12.

Warwickshire, was placed in such a position in the 1630s that some of his congregation found the services inaudible.⁸⁵

Churchwardens were required by the canons and by visitation articles to present clerical offenders who failed to lead worship according to the Book. In 1623, at Clifton Campville, in Shropshire, the curate, Richard Kirke was presented, 'for that wee had noe eveninge prayer upon Sonday the vi th. of July Last and likewise noe morninge praier upon Sonday the third of August last'.⁸⁶ At Uffington, Shropshire, in 1633, the minister was reported for negligence in reading prayers on Sundays, while at Whittaker Superior in 1639, the curate John Blacke was cited for 'neglecting to reade divine prayers on mid lent Sunday last'.⁸⁷ Presentments for omitting prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays were more common. In 1636, at Sutton Maddock, Shropshire, 'the vicar Mr. Ffrancis Wood doth not observe prayer and readinge of the Lettanie of Wednesdays and Frydaies'.⁸⁸ Similarly, there were complaints at Blithfield in Staffordshire (where prayers were also usually omitted on holy days), Frankton, Warwickshire and, in 1639, at the Derbyshire parishes of Caldwell, Chellaston and Mugginton.⁸⁹ At Atcham, Shropshire, the minister, Roger Barker never read prayers on holy days, and only read the litany on the Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent.⁹⁰ In 1635, at Baddesley Clinton, in Warwickshire, the minister neglected the mid-week and holy day-eve services and also failed to wear the surplice.⁹¹ Other omissions included failure to provide sermons. There were no monthly sermons at Weston-

⁸⁵ WCRO, DR 404/48, p.100.

⁸⁶ B/V/1/45.

⁸⁷ B/V/1/53, p.30; 1/63, no pagination.

⁸⁸ B/V/1/60, p.15.

⁸⁹ B/V/1/61, p.99; 1/63.

⁹⁰ B/V/1/65. The *comperta* contain numerous other examples. At Middle, the curate, Thomas Terke, did not read week-day services 'in the holy time of Lent'. Ibid. In an office-promoted case of 1617, the minister of Lillington was accused of failing to read evening prayer on three Saturday evenings. He defended himself by declaring that he had 'either publicquely or privatlye performed his dutie', but that if any could prove him negligent in his calling, 'when he is thereof convicted he will readelye submitt himself'. B/C/5, Lillington, 1617.

⁹¹ B/V/1/56, p.10.

on-Trent in 1633, at Blithfield in 1636, or at Lea Marston or Ness Parva in 1639.⁹² At Chilvers Coton in 1636, John Malin the vicar was presented for not preaching 'these 14 Sundaies together'.⁹³ But Puritan ministers who focused on preaching to the detriment of the liturgy could also find themselves in trouble with their congregations. According to Samuel Clarke, some of William Bradshaw's auditors at Stapenhill complained 'that they had lost many a good epistle and gospel for his preachings'.⁹⁴ With regard to catechising, in 1636 it was reported there was none at Leamington Hastings; at St. Chad's, Shrewsbury, the churchwardens reported in 1639 that 'we have not catechising constantly every Saturday'. Six years earlier, at St. Julian's, there were neither sermons nor catechising.⁹⁵ Sometimes, however, a failure to catechise was due to the absence of catechumens, rather than unwillingness on the part of the minister. Catechetical instruction was clearly an aspect of 'unpopular religion' with the children and youths at Lillington in 1616. Accused of failing to catechise regularly, the minister Thomas Mayo maintained that he had used such diligence in the task that 'noe man of credit he beleeveth can or will accuse him of any fault therein'. He had often given notice of his intentions to instruct the youth of the parish, but had found little or no response. He assured the court that when the youth came to him in good numbers 'he spendeth and will hereafter spend (God willing) a whole hour amongst them to the best of his power'.⁹⁶

There were other attempts to ensure clerical conformity to the Book of Common Prayer over such issues as communion, baptism, the churching of

⁹² B/V1/54, p.31; 1/61, p.94, 1/63; 1/65. Lyle of Moxall was rector of Lea Marston 'and allows the vicar ten pounds p. annum'. Presumably the churchwardens felt that the vicar's small stipend mitigated, to a certain extent, his failure to provide monthly sermons.

⁹³ B/V1/58, p.24. In 1623, at Wombourne, in Staffordshire, the vicar Anthony Hamnett was presented for the combined offence of not preaching monthly sermons nor reading services upon certain Wednesdays and Fridays. 1/46, p.43.

⁹⁴ Clarke, *General Martyrologie*, p.56.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.4; 1/65; 1/53, p.22.

⁹⁶ B/C/5, Lillington, 1616. Office promoted case against the vicar, Thomas Mayo, for failure to say Evening Prayer and to catechise regularly. Amongst the allegations, Mayo had been accused of failing to spend half an hour catechising his charges. He was obviously concerned that the court should recognise his keenness for the task.

women and the burial of the dead. Haigh has helpfully commented that 'historians too frequently use presentments for non-conformity as evidence of widespread hostility to surplices and ceremonies; but many of them were rather pleas for conformity, efforts to force ministers to supply in full the restricted ceremonial endorsed in 1559, for omission of ceremonies was often unpopular and provocative'.⁹⁷ This provides an alternative viewpoint to those examples cited in earlier chapters; as well as revealing non-conforming clergy they may also show the strength of conformity in the same parishes. The canons required that one churchwarden be chosen by the incumbent and the other by the laity. The number of clerical presentments for non-conformity is an indication that churchwardens were sometimes chosen by a majority of parishioners unsympathetic to the Puritanism of their ministers, and may point to local factionalism.⁹⁸ At Knowle, for instance, the puritan, Guilpin, met with the disapproval of at least one of the churchwardens, who presented him for administering the sacrament to those who sat to receive it.⁹⁹

Other ministers whose behaviour transgressed Prayer Book requirements were not so theologically motivated. At Easter 1636, John Martin of Chilvers Coton offended his congregation by using the communion table, which had been

⁹⁷ Haigh, 'Church of England, Catholics and the People', in *idem*(ed.), *Reign of Elizabeth*, p.218.

⁹⁸ Canon 89 Of 1604 required that 'all churchwardens or quest-men in every parish shall be chosen by the joint consent on the minister and the parishioners, if it may be, but if they cannot agree upon such a choice, then the minister shall choose one and the parishioners another'. Churchwardens were to continue in office for a year, after which they were to step down, 'except they be chosen again in like manner' Eric Carlson contends that this was a 'staggering reversal of centuries of lay self-government'; before 1604 churchwardens had been exclusive agents of the parishioners. (II). Presentments within parishes with a non-conforming minister reveal a powerful conformist (or anti-Puritan) faction within the church, with which the minister had to contend. Carlson's study of twenty Cambridgeshire parishes led him to conclude that 'his' churchwardens were conventionally pious rather than extravagantly so. The wardens who emerge from his study of the Cambridgeshire *comperta* were not the "godly" but 'can be comfortably be counted in the unquantifiable mass of the conformable'. In parishes where the non-conforming pastor and the majority of the congregation were in agreement about the unlawfulness of some ceremonies, the *comperta* would contain no record of infringement of the liturgical requirements.

See E.Cardwell (ed.), *Synodalia* (Oxford, 1842), pp.226-7. E.Carlson, 'The office, function and status of the office of churchwarden, with particular reference to the diocese of Ely', in M.Spufford (ed.), *The World of the Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge, 1995), pp.181,204.

⁹⁹ B/V/1/56, p.21. Guilpin did not always wear the surplice nor baptise with the sign of the cross.

prepared for the administration of the sacrament, as a counter on which his parishioners could pay their Easter offering. A number were refused the sacrament, for which they had diligently prepared themselves, because 'they would not reckon with him at that time'.¹⁰⁰ The churchwardens of Uffington were also disturbed by the behaviour of their minister, Mr Fowler. Amongst other offences he allowed 'many servants in the parish to receive co[mmun]ion but upon what ground they know not'. This leniency did not extend to John Edwards, Fowler refusing to administer the sacrament to him, 'his beinge an ignorant man, unlesse he could repeate all D[oct]or Goach his catechisme'.¹⁰¹ At Alfreton, the churchwardens brought a number of complaints against their vicar, Thomas Brooke in 1636. Brooke appears to have been a Puritan, but was also both quarrelsome and eccentric. In the libels against him it is sometimes difficult to discern where his Puritanism ended and this eccentricity began. Apparently 'he gave warninge for 2 sacraments, the one not long after Michaelmas 1635 at which time bread and wine provided & hee went that day to an other church purposely & would not administer the communion at all. The second time was the first Saboth in the new yeare next followinge at which time likewise bred and wine was provided & he absented himselfe & caused the churchdooers to be loket up all the afternoone so that nether churchwarden nor any other of the parishioners could come to the church'. Brooke denied the charge.¹⁰² Thomas Davies, vicar of Grandborough was charged in 1609 with failure to administer the communion three times a year to his congregation.¹⁰³ Common themes in all these cases are

¹⁰⁰ B/V/1/58, p.24.

¹⁰¹ B/V/1/36, p.84. Presumably this refers to young servants who were unconfirmed. Promoters of catechising were concerned about the ignorance of the 'ruder sort', and maintained that 'learning by rote' was the only way that children and especially servants could be taught. Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, pp.232-234.

¹⁰² B/C/5, Alfreton, 1636/1638.

¹⁰³ B/C/5, Grandborough, 1609. Davies denied the charge, maintaining that he had administered communion to his flock 'savinge at such time, as he hath bene visited with sickness and thereby not able to goe to his paryshe church'. On such occasions he believed that a substitute had administered communion. The canons of 1604 stipulated that church members should receive communion three times a year. According to Arnold Hunt, although this ruling was regularly reiterated in visitation articles, it seldom gave rise to presentments and 'seems to have been widely disregarded'. The charge against Davies is probably an example of churchwardens using the

the perceived right of parishioners to receive communion and their expectation that the clerical administration would be undertaken in a manner deemed worthy of the occasion. Communion was firmly rooted in popular culture and held in some veneration. According to the Puritan, John Randall, 'the ordinary people commonly doe make some kind of preparation, according to their manner, when they come to receive the sacrament'. They expected no less from their clergy.¹⁰⁴

Churchwardens were also expected to see that the clergy were appropriately dressed. At the 1635 visitation it was reported at Ladbroke that 'a sufficient surplisse [was] wanting'.¹⁰⁵ The next year, the curate of Allestree, Derbyshire, was presented 'for not usually wearinge the surplisse at time of divine service'; in the same *comperta*, Wamewright, curate at Chesterfield was accused of having worn the surplice only once at Morning Prayer. In 1639, the curate of Smethcott, Roland Jandrell, was reported for 'wearinge unseemly apparel' - a reminder that the clergy were expected to wear clothes befitting their calling at all times - 'and doinge all unseemly work for a minister'.¹⁰⁶

Church officers were also to ensure that the yearly perambulation of the parish boundaries was undertaken. In some places this was entered upon with gusto. At Southam, in South Warwickshire, the churchwardens' accounts contain entries for the provision of bread and beer to sustain the parishioners in their annual procession.¹⁰⁷ Not all clergy and parishioners were as enthusiastic, and there are a number of presentments which attempted to ensure conformity¹⁰⁸ At Checkley, Staffordshire, in 1636, the perambulation was undertaken half-heartedly, 'nether throughout the whole parish nor according to the bounds

opportunity to bolster their case against a minister they disliked on other grounds. Davies was also accused of usury. See above p.39; A. Hunt, 'The Lord's Supper in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 161 (1998), pp.39-83.

¹⁰⁴ J. Randall, *Three and Twentie Sermons: or, Catechetical Lectures upon the Sacrament of the Lords Supper* (London, 1630), quoted in Hunt, 'The Lord's Supper', p.45.

¹⁰⁵ B/V/1/56, p.37.

¹⁰⁶ B/V/1/59, pp.4,77; 1/65.

¹⁰⁷ WCRO, D R 50/9, 'for the breade and beere when they went p[er]ambulacon, 5/6d. in 1635 and 9/6d. in 1636.

¹⁰⁸ See, for instance, B/V/1/53, p.23, Loppington; 1/56, p.7, Berkswell; p.111, Ladbroke; 1/60, p.18, Atcham.

thereof'; in 1635, at Sutton Coldfield it was reported that the perambulation had only been undertaken once in three years, while at Shilton, in 1636, no-one joined the minister to go on the procession.¹⁰⁹ Even when the Rogationtide walk was underway, its solemnity could be undermined. At Shottonington, in 1635, Mistress Grace Kettle 'sent for [a] man to stopp and interrupt us when we were goinge on perambulacon and threatened to indite us for coming upon her grounds within the bounds of our parish'. At Sheriff Hales, in 1636, the procession was disrupted by the swearing and brawling of Thomas Skett.¹¹⁰

Parishioners believed they had a right to be buried in a dignified manner, according to the liturgy and rubric of the Prayer Book. When the rights of the deceased were ignored, or dealt with unsatisfactorily, mourners looked to the church courts for redress. The parishioners of St.Peter's, Derby, felt in 1639 that burial services were being performed inadequately. Thomas Burton, a schoolmaster, was presented for reading services and burying the dead, 'being not lycensed nor in orders'. To the members of the congregation this robbed his ministry of its authority, and short-changed the departed.¹¹¹ They were, however, better placed than the inhabitants of Chellaston, who, for some years before 1636 had only managed to bury their dead by procuring ministers from outside the parish. Their rector, John Hill, did not offer these services to his flock. Also in 1636, the vicar of Berkeswell, Francis Ffolliot offended some of his church officers and parishioners by refusing to bury a still-born child according to the rites of the Church. He was presented for refusing to give 'Christian buriall to the daughter of Edward Fflint and Ffrancis his wife the child being alive within three daies before her delivery'. The situation was exacerbated because Ffolliot's curate, Richard Hall, had buried the child of a recusant, William Higay.¹¹² Likewise, the inhabitants of Wirksworth were scandalised by the lack of co-

¹⁰⁹ B/V/1/61, p.99; 1/56, p.32; 1/58, p.49.

¹¹⁰ B/V/1/56, p.29; 1/61, p.75.

¹¹¹ B/V/1/64.

¹¹² B/V/1/58, p.37. Hall was also presented.

operation from their minister, Edward Haslam. They presented him for refusing to baptise sickly infants in apparent danger of their lives, accusing him of deferring the rite of baptism wilfully and negligently, contrary to the Canon, despite having been informed of the imminence of death and the desire of the parents to have the sacrament administered.¹¹³ Haslam showed similar insensitivity when he failed to bury four lead miners in 1628. The parishioners reported that, despite being informed of the intended burial, Haslam caused the church doors to be locked and the bodies kept out of the church, so that the mourners were 'readie to depart and leave the corps aforesaid unburied'. A similar situation obtained at the attempted burial of William Flint. His body was carried to Wirksworth churchyard stile, where it stood for at least half an hour. Despite being informed of the intended interment Haslam did not appear to bury the corpse. Some of those present 'advised the deceaseds friends to leave the dead bodye there and goe their way'.¹¹⁴ By his absence, Haslam was conspicuously failing to treat the bodies of the dead with appropriate respect, 'both with regard to their prior station in life, and because they had been vessels of the soul, and were destined to rise again'.¹¹⁵

Ministers who ignored the lawful requests of the deceased could also find themselves in trouble. In 1624 Thomas Booth of Shifnal had obtained written permission from Bishop Thomas Morton for John Morton to preach at his funeral. To the annoyance of the preacher, Booth's vicar, Abdias Birch, did not permit Morton to minister at the service. Birch offered a specious defence, one of his reasons being that if he (Birch) had not preached, it would appear there had been

¹¹³ Cardwell, *Synodalia*, Canon LXIX, 1604 Constitutions and Canons, pp.285-6; B/C/5, Wirksworth, 1628.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Canon LXVIII. David Cressy has stated that both Tudor versions of the burial of the dead required that the minister meet the corpse at the church stile (the entry to the churchyard) and accompany it either into the church or towards the grave. It was a matter of social, rather than religious discretion, whether the ceremony took place inside the church or outside in the churchyard. D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death* (Oxford, 1997), p.397.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.389. For similar instances of neglected duty in baptism, and the burial of the dead, which was also brought before the court, see the case of Anthony Armitage of Ellington, Huntingdonshire, cited in Maltby, '“By this Book”', in Fincham (ed.), *Early Stuart Church*, pp.123-126; see also below, pp.278,279, fn. 130.

malice between him and the deceased. Because of his failure with comply with Booth's request and the Bishop's letter, he was brought before the church court.¹¹⁶

If parishioners gave ample evidence of having recourse to authority to ensure that episcopal and canonical rules and articles were adhered to, the records also show that they expected their clerics to live lives worthy of their calling. Conduct regarded as unbecoming might be reported. The curate of Wirksworth, Edward Haslam, was charged with other misdemeanours in addition to his refusal to turn up to bury parishioners. The libel of 1628 accused him of incontinence, professional dishonesty, habitual frequenting of alehouses, drunkenness, and being a quarreller and a fighter.¹¹⁷ In 1609 the case brought against Thomas Davies of Grandborough included an accusation of usury.¹¹⁸ At Sowe, in 1620, George Dale, the non-resident vicar, was accused of being a common swearer, 'and swore as though he were madd'. Before administering the sacrament he allegedly declared that he would 'pull downe the vicarage house and sell it to goe to law with his neighbours'. His combative style is also evident in the report that the congregation had 'noe sermon but one'. Dale announced this was all they were going to receive, saying 'that noe sermon they shall have but is gotten by lawe'. Unsurprisingly, he was not an enthusiastic catechiser.¹¹⁹ In 1606, Maurice Jones of Baddesley Clinton was charged with being unlicensed. This did not deter him from preaching in his parish church and neighbourhood, even though his parishioners expressed their dissatisfaction with his ministry. He was accused of having 'so slenderlie and unlearnedly performed that you have bred such a dislike and offence to the auditory that the people have manie times departed forth from the churche discontented and left you alone in the pulpit'. He compounded his offence by haunting ale houses and 'bawdy houses' 'against the honour and dignitie' of the ministerial office. On one occasion he remarked that the baptising

¹¹⁶ B/C/5, 1624, Shifnal.

¹¹⁷ B/C/5, 1628, Wirksworth.

¹¹⁸ B/C/5, 1609, Grandborough.

¹¹⁹ B/V/1/40, f.8.

of children was unnecessary, a comment seen as 'an offence to the hearers and an evell example of others'. On another occasion, Jones was accused of being so drunk that he was incapable of returning home and ended up in a bawdy house. His wife also behaved in a manner which was deemed to be incompatible with her station and sex. It was reported that, accompanying her husband to an ale house, she diced and became drunk, leaving the house for the green where 'as the men were pissinge she also pissed with them as she stood, to the great scandal of the ministry'.¹²⁰

Congregations expected their pastors to set a good example, and this requirement extended to church officers. In 1638 the parishioners of Great Harborough objected to the choice of churchwarden made by their rector, Thomas Bassett who chose Thomas (?) Brokys to hold the office for two successive years. The parishioners took exception to Brokys's financial irregularities as well as his morality, complaining that 'we are loath for humanities sake to expresse his odious conversation, unlesse your worshipp please to command us to bring it to your examinacon'. They also reported that Bassett kept a 'comon schole' in the church against their consent, 'whereby the windows are defaced and other damages done', and requested that the situation be remedied and redressed.¹²¹

Moral misdemeanours added weight to accusations of clerical non-conformity and negligence. Thomas Brooke, vicar of Alfreton, took exception to his churchwardens entreating the congregation to reform itself because it had omitted to stand at the creed, bow at the name of Jesus and kneel at the sacrament. He attempted to force the churchwardens for the previous year to present them. A pugnacious non-conformist, Brooke 'affrighted' his officers from the performance of their duties with threats of Star Chamber, insults, and, on one occasion, by shaking one of them by the beard. Claiming that he would rather lose his life than read the Book of Sports, he was also charged with irreverence from the pulpit.

¹²⁰ B/C/5, 1606, Baddesley Clinton.

¹²¹ B/C/5, 1638, Great Harborough.

Impartial in his belligerence, he threatened Anthony Morewood, 'the chiefe man in our parishe', who had left the church before the preaching was over 'by reason of an infirmitie', declaring that 'if he went forth again he would fetch him againe with a vengeance'. Brooke twice refused to administer the sacrament, on one occasion locking the church.¹²²

The Failings of the Laity

Presentments for clerical misbehaviour do not imply, of course, that all lay parishioners were models of piety, zeal or even conformity. The *comperta* reveal a significant strand of the laity who were ungodly, worldly, or indifferent, especially among the young and the poor. Laypersons were frequently presented for drinking instead of attending church services. There were other reasons for absence. In 1633 the presentments for Shropshire included offenders who sold ale and played ball in 'prayer time,' worked on Sundays (keeping a flour mill grinding, and 'sellinge fleshe in open shope on Sondag' mornings), tumbled in their own homes and received company within the time of prayer.¹²³ Similar presentments can be found throughout the other three archdeaconries. The law demanded, and churchwardens expected, that parishioners be present at public worship on Sundays. In 1614, when the recusant Frances Shelley of Ronton dissuaded Thomasina Hamon from church attendance, contending that 'yt were better to beare 9 children by 9 severall men than come to church', her ensuing presentment may not have come as a complete surprise.¹²⁴

There is also evidence of a lack of enthusiasm for being catechised. In 1620, William Phillips, corvizer to a weaver in the parish of St. Chad's, Shrewsbury was presented for making a disturbance during the catechetical class.

¹²² B/C/5, 1636/1638, Alfreton. See also p.33. The libel contained other accusations, the vast majority of which Brooke denied.

¹²³ B/V/1/53, Leebotwood, Leighton, pp.23; Ruyton, p.28; Whitchurch, p.32; Wem, p.35.

¹²⁴ B/V/1/30, p.39.

At least he was present. In the same year, eight young people at Uffington were reported for absenting themselves, while at Hodnet, William Pitchford, servant to John Browne and John Owen, the servant of Rowland Hill were both presented 'for not coming to be catechised uppon warning'.¹²⁵

At worship the congregation were expected to conform to the requirements of the liturgy and rubric and conduct themselves in a fitting manner. Presentments for misbehaviour in church are legion. They include such distractions as 'not usinge reverence in time of Divine Service and abusinge himselfe in the church'; 'irreverent speeches in the church towards the minister and other inhabitants'; 'disturbinge the congregacon in time of Divine Service and sermon ... strivinge for a seate wherein neither of them have any interest' (two women); and 'an accustomed blasphemmer and swearer ... for laughinge and fleering and irreverent behaviour in church'.¹²⁶ At Marton, a youth was presented for attempting to 'trip maids as they come to church', while at Offchurch Thomas Sparrowe was reported for 'striking 'one Jeacocke of Ufton'.¹²⁷ John Eldred, vicar of Bulkington, presented George Burdit for behaving himself 'very undecently in the church ... upon Whitsonday and deriding me in my office of catechising, and casting his flowers at his wench'. At Walsall, George Robinson disturbed the congregation by climbing over the seats; his fellow-worshipper, Robert Bower, took 'tobacco in time of devine service'.¹²⁸ At St Alkmund's, Derby, John Sidney arrived at church drunk, and proceeded to vomit. He conceded to the court that he 'was somewhat overtaken with drinke that time but it is not usuall with him'. Thomas Coller of Stoke-on-Trent took 'the Psalme out of the ministers mouth as

¹²⁵ B/V/1/39, pp.50, 53, 31.

¹²⁶ B/V/1/54, Newcastle-under-Lyme, p.24; 1/56, Alestrey, p.1; Whittaker Inferior, p.31; Shustoke p.37. In 1625, Edrus Dimmocke of Chebsay was presented 'for using unseemly speeches against Minister and churchwardens saying his sister should not receive this yeare nor next and let them goe shite'. B/V/1/47, p.31.

¹²⁷ B/V/1/58, pp.8,19.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.25; B/V/1/61, p.30.

he was giving it', and afterwards justified his behaviour. He was unsuccessful, and presented as a consequence.¹²⁹

The existence of such presentments reveals the behaviour of unwilling and irreverent parishioners, but it would be wrong to conclude that 'plebeian irreligion' was the norm. The accusations also witness to the efforts of the churchwardens to impose conformity. Acting as the representatives of cleric and parish, at least one of them was the appointed mouthpiece of the majority of parishioners within their respective congregations. The presentments are therefore an indication of a significant conformist presence within the churches.

What impression of conformity emerges from these records? Not a complete one: they may, for instance, indicate some desire for preaching amongst congregations, but they do not indicate the type of preaching that was popular (for example whether there was a preference for sermons on providential judgments rather than 'painful' exhortations). Evidence of this must be sought elsewhere. They do reveal, amongst some influential parishioners, an enthusiasm for the worship of the church, and a desire to be able to follow the prescribed liturgy and to observe holy days. They also show an expectation amongst the members of the church that its 'special' services, such as baptism, communion and the burial of the dead were available to them. Parishioners held the communion service in some reverence, but nevertheless believed that they had a right to participate in the sacrament. They were averse to ministerial behaviour which was deemed irreverent for such a solemn occasion, but equally averse to attempts of painful clergy to fence the table spiritually. A Christian view of the body as the receptacle of the soul, and the object of Christ's saving love, seems to have obtained. There was an expectation of Christian burial, and that dead bodies should be treated with respect. When the clergy proved negligent, as in the cases at Wirksworth, great offence was taken.¹³⁰ To a certain extent, conformity

¹²⁹ B/V/1/64; 1/61, p.77.

¹³⁰ Cressy has commented: 'Though materially dead, the body deserved reverential treatment, both in respect for what it had been and for what it would become...If a funeral was rushed or

embraced a belief in the effective salvation of all the members of the established church, as Puritan critics were at pains to show. The clerical office was generally respected, and the clergy were expected to perform their duties conscientiously, in a manner becoming to their profession. When the liturgy was truncated, or ministerial behaviour deemed offensive (through, for instance Puritan zeal, indolence, absence, moral failings or eccentricity), parishioners often had recourse to the courts.

This description of some of the characteristics of conformity indicates that many members of the established church believed they had a 'right' to the services of the church, both liturgical and clerical. However, it is probable that its strength was based on more than the Church's prescriptive role as the legal purveyor of Christianity. When it was faced with radical reform in the early 1640s, many of the laity petitioned Parliament expressing enthusiasm for its liturgy and government. This seems to indicate that as well as irreligion, indifference or passive acceptance there was a substantial minority who were genuinely committed to the prescribed worship of the established Church. However, prior to the 1640s, the theological nature of this conformity is uncertain. The evidence points to a parish-based inclusivist religion (as opposed to the predestinarian exclusivism of the godly), centred around a veneration for the services of the Prayer Book, to whose rites its members believed they had a legitimate claim. Evidence of support for reformed Protestantism from these sources is not so readily apparent. Perhaps most of those who later subscribed to the Petitions for the retention of the liturgy and bishops were genuine Protestants, and were amongst those who had previously complained about ministerial and congregational misdemeanours, but the largely unreformed character of the religious complaints of the 1630s leaves this very largely a matter of speculation.

mishandled it was likely to be complained of that the party had been treated like a beast..Human remains deserved reverential respect, both with regard to their prior station in life, and because they had been vessels of the soul and were destined to rise again. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p.389.

Haigh's claim that his unprotestantised Parish Anglicans came to centre their religious enthusiasm on the Prayer Book rites of the Church and provided the foundation for the parochial support for Laudianism seems even harder to verify.

CHAPTER 8

The Diocese and the Coming of War, 1640-1642

This chapter will look first at evidence of the collapse of Laudianism within the diocese. The period saw the initiative in church government passing from the ecclesiastical hierarchy to Parliament and influential laymen. What was the local impact of the parliamentary directives of 1640-1642? The focus will then centre on how far religion was a determining factor in political affiliation. Puritans were the most active parliamentarians, as in most places, confirming Richard Baxter's contention that 'painful' religionists tended to espouse the cause of Parliament.¹ By what means did Puritan landowners and clerics attempt to sway public opinion? What light does local support for the King throw on John Morrill's claim that the Civil War was the last of Europe's wars of religion, and what part, if any, did Catholics play in the conflict?² They had ample reason to fear Parliament, but little cause to be grateful to Charles, who had been happy to squeeze them financially in the 1630s.

The Collapse of Laudianism within the Diocese

In February 1641, a bill was introduced into the House of Commons to abolish superstition and idolatry, and for the advancement of the true worship and service of God. Less than a month later, the Lords ordered all bishops to oversee that every diocesan communion table 'should stand in the ancient place where it ought to do by the law, and as it hath done for the greater part of these three score years last past'.³ Further anti-Laudian measures followed.⁴ John Morrill has

¹ M. Sylvester (ed.), *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, (London, 1696), p.31.

² J.Morrill, 'The Religious Context of the English Civil War', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, xxxiv (1984), pp.155-178.

³ *Commons' Journals* (London, 1802), ii, p.79; *Lords' Journals*, iv, p.174.

commented that by the summer of 1642 few bishops retained any authority in their dioceses, most church courts had ceased to function, and there was neither parliamentary will nor effective mechanism to modify the liturgy and formal worship of the Church. The altar rail, 'the outward and visible sign of Laudian innovation', had disappeared from most parishes far more speedily than it had gone up.⁵ What evidence for the widespread removal of this archetypal Laudian feature can be found in the diocese?

In 1641 Anne Temple, writing to her daughter in Sussex of her experience in Warwickshire, rejoiced that

God is exceedingly good to us every way, both for bodies and souls and hath done wonderful things among us already and gives us hope of more and that we shall see idolatry and superstition rooted out and God's ordinances set up in the purity and power of them. Altars begin to go down apace and rails in many places; and yours must follow if it be not down already; let us labour to be thankful and continue our prayers.⁶

At Wolverhampton, local animosity against the railed altar was evidenced when some Puritans entered the parish church on the night of 8th March 1641, smashed the rail and pulled the table into the nave.⁷ Elsewhere, the removal of the rails was undertaken in a more orderly manner. Early in 1641, the churchwardens at St. Mary's, Lichfield, paid 1s. 4d. for 'takeinge down the Railles and levelling the ground where the same stood to remove the table', sixpence for the certificate of the order to the Parliament and a shilling for 'lyme and other materialls to level the chauncell'.⁸ In the same year, St. Mary's, Shrewsbury, spent £1 9s. 6d. in

⁴ C.J., ii, pp.279,280,287,289; W.A.Shaw, *A History of the English Church During the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth* (London, 1900), vol.i, pp.104-6,108-110; L.J., vi, pp. 198-200; C.J., iii, p.220.

⁵ J.Morrill, 'The attack on the Church of England in the Long Parliament', in D.Beales and G.Best (eds.), *History, Society and the Churches* (London, 1985), pp.105-124.

⁶ Quoted in A. Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge, 1987), p.131.

⁷ See Wolverhampton chapter.

⁸ LJRO, D20, St.Mary's.

‘pulling downe the altar & for work of ould left unp[ai]d & paving in the Church about 19 and a half pews’. In 1642, 13/9d. was paid at St. Julian’s, Shrewsbury, ‘for takeinge downe the Rayles and setti[n]ge them about the chancell to make seatte[s] off and mendinge Mr. Majors seatte’.⁹ In July 1641, in response to a parliamentary order transmitted by the Bishop, the vestry of Holy Trinity, Coventry, unanimously condemned the altar-wise position of the table, declaring that the money expended on it would have been much better deployed in repairs to the church. They ordered that the table be returned to its ‘ancient site’, the ground levelled and the rails taken away, complaining that its Laudian position was an illegal innovation which had cost the parish more than £30.¹⁰ The church officers also showed their hostility to innovations in regard to the organ and organist. The instrument had been procured during Buggs’s ministry, with an organist appointed on an annual salary of £10. William Lambe, who held the post, had his stipend reduced to £4, and then abolished. In November 1641, it was ordered that ‘whereas the orgaynes now standing in the church, hath formerly been silenced, shall, betwixt this time and the 21st. day of December, be sould and taken down, for the best advantage’. If the churchwardens were unable to find a buyer during this period, the organs were to be removed and stored in the old vestry until a purchaser could be found.¹¹

Despite these examples, it does not appear that compliance with Parliament’s ruling was universal. Churchwardens’ accounts often note expenses for setting up rails, but few mention payments for their removal and the subsequent levelling of the east end of the chancel. For instance, in 1636, the churchwardens of the Derbyshire parish of Marston-on-Dove paid £1 5s. for the ‘raile in the chancell’. There is no subsequent record, in the period 1640-1642, of

⁹ SHRO, P257/B/3/2; P256/7, microfiche.

¹⁰ They had applied to the diocesan Chancellor for a refund for the costs which were entailed with the removal. He declined to assist them, and the expenses were paid by Holy Trinity.

¹¹ B.Poole, *Coventry: its History and Antiquities* (London, 1870), p.90.

it being dismantled.¹² At Tong in the 1630s. £1 4s. had been paid ‘to the joyner for the frame aboute the Communion Table’, but the accounts make no reference to its later removal.¹³ In these parishes, presumably, the communion table was left standing, at least until the early years of the war. Shawbury, in Shropshire, bucked the national trend in 1641 when William Davis was reimbursed ‘towards his las [loss] when the chancell [this word is crossed out] fell on the Railes’. Whether this entry sought to cover up the activity of local Puritans is uncertain; whatever the cause of the damage, the churchwardens paid two men for its repair.¹⁴ It is likely that the rails remained until the church was occupied by a Parliamentary garrison in 1647. The same situation probably obtained in the wealthy parish of Whitchurch. The meticulous churchwardens’ accounts record in 1634 that £3 8s. was paid ‘for the making of the Rayle about the Communion Table’ and there are other entries which also bear witness to a concern that church fixtures and fittings were kept in the best order. As late as 1643, the churchwardens were still attending the Archdeacon’s visitation at Shrewsbury. There is no record that the rails were removed; they were presumably destroyed by the Parliamentary garrison who occupied the church in the mid 1640s.¹⁵ At Checkley, in Staffordshire, the rails remained until 1644, when 6d. was paid to John Arnold for their removal.¹⁶ At Myddle, in Shropshire, Richard Gough recorded that in the 1630’s ‘there was a new Communion Table made, a very good one, and alsoe new Communion Railes, which were placed square on three sides of the Communion Table’. It is likely that these remained in the parish until the end of the War, or even later, for ‘When Parliament had gott the upper hand of

¹² DRO, M331, vol. 18. The accounts scrupulously record small payments; for instance, when the communion table was brought ‘home’ the transportation cost of 2d. was duly entered. If the rail had been dismantled it is therefore fair to assume that the cost would have been entered into the accounts.

¹³ SHRO, 281/B/1/1. Staffordshire parishes where there is no indication that the rail was removed include Pattingham, Biddulph, Harbury and Eccleshall, Staffordshire Record Office, D/3451/2/2; D/359/2/1; D 1528/4/1; WSL 236/27.

¹⁴ SHRO, P241/84, microfiche.

¹⁵ SHRO, P303/B/1/1/2, /3, Whitchchurch churchwardens’ accounts.

¹⁶ SRO, Checkley, D/113/A/PC/1.

the King, they made an ordinance, that the Comunion Railes should be pulled downe in every place; and these att Myddle were taken downe, and the chancell floor was made leuell, and the Comunion Table placed in the middle of it'.¹⁷

Although the removal of rails was a patchy process, in part because the order for their removal had political as well as ecclesiological implications, it is clear that Laudian authority in the diocese was broken, and that the initiative for Church reform had passed to Parliament. Bishop Wright was a spent force, willing to act as a channel for Parliament's orders to Coventry in July 1641. He showed some spirit the following December, when he joined Bishop Williams and ten other bishops who protested to Charles of being intimidated and assaulted on their way to the Lords, and declared that their enforced absence made the legislative procedure of the House null and void. Charles passed the complaint to the Lords; it was forwarded to the Commons who promptly impeached and arrested the bishops. They were sent to the Tower, although Wright and Morton of Durham were allowed to remain in the house of the Usher of the Black Rod because of their age.¹⁸ In February 1642, Wright appeared before the bar of the House of Commons. Old and clearly frightened, he thanked them for allowing him to speak, denying that he had framed or 'contrived' the Protestation, although he admitted having signed it. If he had erred in doing so, it was through unskilfulness, weakness of comprehension or too much confidence in others: it was not done with 'any propensed malice, or out of a spirit of contradiction as the Lord knoweth'. He asked the House to pardon his offence, or, failing that, for his censure to be proportionate to the transgression. Recalling his '58 years painful, constant and successful preaching of the Gospel of Christ' at home and abroad, he pleaded that his current disgrace meant he would never have the heart to show his face in the pulpit again, 'wherein I have wished to end my days'. He planned to appeal to his diocese, and his previous charge of Bristol, for testimonials on his

¹⁷ R. Gough, *A History of Myddle* (Fontwell, 1968), pp.44-45.

¹⁸ B. Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution* (London, 1991), pp.150-151; *DNB*.

behalf, and asked for a speedy return to Coventry and Lichfield.¹⁹ After eighteen weeks' imprisonment, Wright was ordered to return to his diocese, and withdrew to his residence at Eccleshall.²⁰

Further evidence of the new order can be found in the sudden reversal of fortunes in the long-running feud between the Puritan, Sir John Corbet, baronet, patron of the living of Adderley in north-east Shropshire, and members of the 'High Church' Needham family, his fellow-parishioners.²¹ In 1625, Sir Robert Needham had been created Viscount Kilmorey, thus taking precedence over Corbet. Determined to outdo him, Kilmorey decided to have private chapels both at home and within the parish church. Claiming to be 'destitute of a seate in the ... church for himselfe wyfe and children', and pre-eminent in the parish, he asked William Noy, the attorney-general, if he might erect an aisle, on the sole authority of the Bishop, without the consent of either the patron or the incumbent'. Noy replied with an unequivocal negative.²² Undeterred, Kilmorey petitioned the King, and also approached Laud, who granted a licence, and the chapel was built in 1637.²³ Corbet expressed his continuing contempt for his enemy by having his Irish foot-boy buried in the chancel, near the grave of Kilmorey's mother.

¹⁹ He told the Commons concerning Bristol, 'which I can never name without that title,' ('his' diocese) 'not only in respect of their piety, unity, and conformity, but also in respect of their love, kindness and extraordinary bounty unto me'. If he should outlive his credit his 'grey hairs and many years would soon be brought with sorrow to the grave'. He concluded his defence by blessing the House, wishing God would bestow on them the 'dew of Heaven and the fatness of the earth'. *The Parliamentary History of England, vol.ii, 1625-1642* (London, 1807), pp.1111-1114.

²⁰ It was garrisoned for the King by 'Dr. Bird', a civilian, in the early stages of the Civil War. Sir William Brereton laid siege to the mansion, during which time Wright died in August 1643.

²¹ Corbet (1594-1662) had a record of opposition to some of the more autocratic Caroline measures. He had opposed the forced loan in 1627. In 1629, as High Sheriff of Shropshire he protested at Quarter Sessions against the levy of mustermasters' fees by the Lord Lieutenant, and, as a consequence, was removed from the commission of the peace and committed to the Fleet prison for over twenty-four weeks. In 1635, he was again committed to the Fleet on information presented against him in Star Chamber, but was released after petitioning the King. He opposed the ship money rate in 1638. In 1640, he was returned as one of the knights for Shropshire, which he represented throughout the Long Parliament. He was later a Presbyterian elder. *DNB*; M. Keeler, *The Long Parliament* (Philadelphia, 1954), p.142.

²² 'No man of the p[ar]ish of what cond[I]con so[ev]er may buyld an Isle or demolysh p[ar]t of the church for the purpose without consent of the byshop and the patron and the incumbent, and also of the p[ar]ishioners'.

²³ F.A.Hibbert, 'Adderley and its Church', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, xlvii (1931-2), pp.123-125; H.D.Harrod, *The History of Shavington* (Shrewsbury, 1891), pp.57-8.

Kilmorey had recourse to the authorities once more, and Corbet was 'condignely censured' by the Lord Marshall.

To achieve his ends, the Viscount had regular recourse to the ecclesiastical and secular hierarchies. His application to Laud for permission to erect his own chapel enabled the Archbishop to exert his ecclesiastical authority over the rights of a secular patron, and also to by-pass Bishop Wright.

The collapse of Laudian authority, and Laud's imprisonment in 1641, weakened Kilmorey's position, and the Corbets took full advantage, gaining possession of the chapel through a mixture of force and cunning.²⁴ Kilmorey once again consulted the authorities about his rights, but was advised that, in the new climate, it was unlikely he would obtain any redress. He also petitioned Laud, but the Archbishop was now powerless to help him.²⁵ Corbet's earlier quiescence had been more apparent than real. When Laud's authority collapsed, he and his wife quickly reasserted his rights as patron. Their success reveals the extent to which the situation had already changed in the provinces. The breach between the two families was carried into the Civil War. The Needhams were committed Royalists; Corbet sat as a member for Shropshire throughout the Long Parliament.²⁶

Religion and Political Allegiance

John Morrill has maintained that the English Civil War was the last of Europe's wars of religion.²⁷ It has long been accepted that Puritan landowners were in most places the most zealous and energetic parliamentarians. Richard Baxter made the point in his memoirs:

But the generality of the people through the land (I say not all, or every one) who were then called Puritans, Precisians, Religious Persons that

²⁴ Harrod, *Shavington*, pp.69-71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.71. The consistory court ceased to function in 1642; see LJRO, B/C/2/73; B/C/3/18.

²⁶ M.D.G. Wanklyn, 'Landed Society and allegiance in Cheshire and Salop in the First Civil War' (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1976).

²⁷ J.Morrill, 'Religious Context of the Civil War', p.178.

used to talk of God, and Heaven and Scripture and Holiness, and to follow sermons, and read books of devotion, and pray in their families, and spend the Lord's Day in religious exercises, and plead for mortification, and serious devotion, and strict obedience to God, and speak against swearing, cursing, drunkenness, profaneness, etc, I say the main body of this sort of men, both preachers and people, adhered to the parliament.²⁸

Cliffe, in his work on the Puritan gentry, concurs with Baxter's observation, and Ann Hughes, in her study of Warwickshire, has also shown how militant Puritans supported the parliamentary side.²⁹

Examples abound throughout the diocese to confirm that Puritans took a leading role for Parliament. The regicide William Purefoy of Caldecote was M.P. for Coventry in 1628, and sat for the county in both the Short and the Long Parliaments.³⁰ He was an early opponent of the monarchy, and Dugdale claimed that he had come to such anti-monarchical views while living in Geneva in 1612.³¹ His will proclaims his assured Calvinism. He trusted that, 'When I shall be removed from this house of clay, I shall be taken into those blessed mansions of everlasting happiness, prepared for, and predestined, to the elect by the eternal decree of the Almighty God'.³² According to *Mercurius Rusticus*, Purefoy had led soldiers into St. Mary's Church, Warwick, as early as June 1642, where they defaced some of the monuments. They also 'broke down some of the cross in the market place, Purefoy all the while standing by, animating and encouraging them until they had finished their so barbarous work'. Hughes notes that, 'as the war continued, Purefoy...became a really formidable figure'. He became more

²⁸ Sylvester, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, p.31.

²⁹ J.T.Cliffe, *Puritans in Conflict* (London, 1988), p.20; Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, pp.166-167.

³⁰ Purefoy (1580-1659) had opposed both the forced loan and the knighthood fines.

³¹ According to Dugdale, in *The Troubles of England*, about a year after Charles's execution, Purefoy declared, 'I bless God, that I have now lived to see the ruin of the monarchy, and that I have been instrumental in it: for I do here acknowledge that it hath been my design ever since I was at Geneva, which is now thirty-eight years'.

³² PRO, Prob., 11/304, f.77.

prominent in Parliament, where he was increasingly identified with the 'war party'.³³

Sir John Gell was equally formidable in his role as Parliamentary leader in Derbyshire. In 1647 he was described in *A Survey of England's Champions* as 'religious Sir John Gell (whose worth is such as speaks him to be a man beloved of his countrey and feared of his enemies) valiant in his actions and faithfull in his ends to promote truth and peace'.³⁴ Lucy Hutchinson was less impressed, claiming that Gell had neither understanding enough to judge the cause, 'nor noe pietie or holinesse being a fowle adulterer all the time he serv'd Parliament', although her evaluation was coloured by personal animosity.³⁵ Cliffe cites more positive evidence of Gell's Puritan piety and zeal. In November 1642, shortly after taking possession of Derby for Parliament, Gell received an admiring letter from a servant who saw his master as engaged in 'manifold and urgent employments for the maintenance of God's true religion and the protection of our county...by this shewing your selfe a good magistrat but by the other a singular Christian'. The writer hoped that 'God, who hath begun so pious an act in yow, that by it god may be glorified, religion advanced, popery suppressed and you (with my mistris your vertuouse good Lady) for all your losses and crosses in this life everlastingly rewarded'.³⁶ More direct evidence of Gell's interest in religion can be found in the short notes he made on theological subjects.³⁷ Gell was an

³³ F.L.Colville, *The Worthies of Warwickshire* (Warwick, 1869); Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War* pp.174-175.

³⁴ Josiah Ricraft, *A Survey of England's Champions and Truths faithfull Patriots* (London, 1647), p.79. 'It is honor enough for gallant Gell to be patron of these vertuous parts of which also deceased Hambden was a man deserves to be put in the same for a gallant, valiant, vertuous saint'. p.116?

³⁵ C.H.Firth (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* (London, 1906), pp.101-3, and Appendix 6.

³⁶ Cliffe, *Puritans in Conflict*, pp.59-60.

³⁷ DRO, D 258/36/34/1. The subjects were the preaching ministry, and the care that needed to be exercised to ensure that preferments were not given to those possessing natural ability alone, the debasement of excommunication as an 'ordinarie processe', and non-residence and pluralities. Chaplains to the nobility and royalty should not have another benefice, 'for it were reasonable that their maintenance should liberally proceede thence whence their labors be employed'. The criticism of excommunication was a particularly Puritan preoccupation.

active friend of godly ministers, as his correspondence with Immanuel Bourne testifies.³⁸

Sir George Gresley of Drakelow joined Gell after the capture of Derby. According to Gell, at that stage of the war he was the 'only gentleman in the country that cordially appeared on our side'.³⁹ Gresley's Civil War allegiance was grounded on his ability to convince himself that his choice had scriptural warrant. In his commonplace book he lists 'Doubts and Satisfactions' with regard to the lawfulness of going to war against the King. To the question, 'whether may the people defend themselves by Arms?', Gresley answered, 'if not, Christians were the most miserable in the world, and sure communities were never made to dissolve by the human passion'.⁴⁰ Gresley's answers to his doubts are specious and opaque, managing to by-pass express scriptural commands; nevertheless they reveal the importance he placed on being able to justify himself within a biblical framework (a mark of Puritanism)- and his answers satisfied him.

Sir John Coke of Melbourne (1608-1650) was another committed Puritan and parliamentarian. The son of Charles's Secretary of State, he was M.P. for Derbyshire, 1640-1650. A political moderate, he spoke in the Commons against the clergy responsible for the canons of 1640. His letters from London to his father show his radical anti-episcopalianism. Writing in a disguised hand in February 1641, he commented: 'The Bishops' party seems to increase in the Lower House. I doubt most are for their reformation only, whereas it appears to me by what is represented against them that their order is a burthen and a dangerous inconvenience in the commonwealth'.⁴¹ The letters also testify to a zealous

³⁸ See the letters he received from Immanuel Bourne concerning the Derbyshire petition of 1642, D258/30/25/1/2.

³⁹ *VCH, Derbyshire, ii*, pp.126-27.

⁴⁰ DRO, D 803 M/29. To the question, 'but are we forbid to resist authority in Scripture?' Gresley admits the scriptural teaching, and claims that he does not resist authority, but rather 'Tyrannie & Tyranny is no power ordynance from God and commands in scripture run alwaye in a dyrect lyne and not in an oblique. His 'satisfaction' to the 'doubt' that 'the ancye Christians rather suffered then tooke armes' is that modern Protestants had defended themselves, and that the situations in which ancient and modern believers were placed were very different.

⁴¹ Keeler, *Long Parliament*, p.137; W. Notestein (ed.), *The Journals of Sir Simonds Dewes* (New Haven, 1923), p.52; *HMC, Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part II*, vol II, p.272.

personal religion ('I hope I shall never appear to have deserted my religion or my country, which are dearer to me than my life') and a care for his father's spiritual well-being.⁴² His concern for church reform is seen in his comment to his father that 'some propositions are now in hand for settling the present government of the church, until it be altered by law to prevent the intolerable abuses daily committed'.⁴³ He remained with Parliament during the war, promising two horses 'for the defence of King and Parliament', and was a member of the sub-committee of the Parliamentary Grand Committee for Religion, which liaised with the Westminster Assembly, and advised the grand Committee, producing draft ordinances. A popular member of the House, he was ordered, with Nathaniel Hallows and Sir John Curzon, to execute the Militia Ordinance in Derbyshire.

The same pattern is found elsewhere in the diocese. At Shrewsbury, Alderman Thomas Hunt attempted to train the local militia, and the town petitioned Parliament to grant them security for its exercise. Hunt, who was M.P. for Shrewsbury in the Short Parliament of 1640, was several times bailiff of the town. His Puritan credentials were of the highest order, and extended to a godly wife, described on her demise in 1690 as 'another rare pattern of zealous piety, abounding charity and eminent usefulness in her place'.⁴⁴ Matthew Henry, the Bible commentator, commended Hunt himself as 'a true Nathaniel, an Israelite indeed, in whom was no Guile: one that like Caleb, followed the Lord fully in difficult times. He was ... very active for God in his generation, abounding in good works'.⁴⁵ Royalists took a different view. In August 1642 the Royalist Grand Jury of Shrewsbury assizes drew up a Declaration and Protestation in favour of the Commission of Array and attempted to proceed against Hunt for executing the Militia Ordinance. He fled from the town.⁴⁶ In Staffordshire, active

⁴² HMC, *ibid.*, pp.273,284,307. He sent him *Apostacy of the Latter Times* and Grotius's *Notes on the Evangelists*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.315.

⁴⁴ M.H.Lee (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of Philip Henry* (London, 1882), pp.373-374.

⁴⁵ M.Henry, *An Account of the life and Death of Mr. Philip Henry* (Shrewsbury, 1765), p.286.

⁴⁶ H.Beaumont 'Events in Shropshire at the Commencement of the Great Civil War', *T.S.A.S.* vol.ii (1941-2), pp.11-39. Hunt was appointed to the committee of 'the Association of the Counties of

Parliamentarians included Michael Noble (c.1591-1649), M.P. for Lichfield from 1640 until his death. His wife had been a disciple of Dame Eleanor Davies, and he had allowed the prophetess to stay in his home, despite the disapproval of the cathedral authorities. His interest in religious matters is further evidenced by his membership of two Parliamentary groups concerned with church reform, the Committee for Preaching Ministers (which also included Sir John Corbet) and the committee of an Act against Pluralities and Spiritual Promotions (Purefoy was a co-member).⁴⁷

Puritan clergy within the diocese championed the parliamentary cause in other ways. Several, such as Richard Vines of Weddington, Anthony Burgess of Sutton Coldfield, Edward Corbett (who had links with Shropshire and was related to Sir John Corbet) and Thomas Lightfoot (vicar of Uttoxeter, Staffordshire, 1617-1653), were among the carefully selected clerics who preached before Parliament in the early years of the War, urging it to continue the work of reformation and root out Catholicism.⁴⁸ Burges used the figure of John the Baptist, who as Christ's forerunner came to prepare the way for Him, as the scriptural warrant for the religious purging undertaken by Parliament. He urged M.P.s to 'goe on exactly, consult not with flesh and blood, leave not in your Building any hookes standing out, that may teare those who goe by'. They must remove all impediments to 'make way for Christ when he is coming to us'.⁴⁹ In a sermon published as *Elias redivivus*, Thomas Lightfoot also used John the Baptist as a spiritual type for Parliament in its labours of nationwide reformation and reconciliation to Christ. Two things, he maintained, kept the Jews and Christ apart: corruption of manners and of doctrine. The Jews, who bore a striking similarity to the Laudians, were vehemently addicted to their traditions and legal

Warwick, Stafford and Salop' in April 1643, and was a Colonel in the Parliamentary army. Baxter described him as 'a plain-hearted, honest, godly man, entirely beloved and trusted by his soldiers for his honesty'.

⁴⁷ *Commons' Journals*, ii, pp.54, 101.

⁴⁸ Morrill, 'The attack on the Church of England', p.118.

⁴⁹ A.Burgess, *The Difficulty and the Encouragements to a Reformation* (London, 1643).

rights. Lightfoote assured his audience that such a godly reformation as the one on which they had embarked was never wrought in a 'corrupted state' 'but with these opposals'. The Church was not to be a union of elements of Protestantism and Catholicism; communion between Christ and Belial was an impossibility. He blessed Parliament's endeavours 'that strive so much and so constantly to keep us clear of re-engagements'.⁵⁰ Edward Corbett, in a bellicose sermon to the Commons in December 1642, urged them to respond to God's providence with diligence, and insisted that God was never more honoured than when the kingdom suffered violence and it was better to die for Christ than be emperor of the whole world.⁵¹

Richard Vines had preached a similar message at St. Margaret's Westminster, in November, declaring that 'if ever in any great business God did intwist his owne interest with ours, it is now the case'. If, after all the other national provocations which the Almighty had received

We should be brought to the borders of that long prayed for rest from our yokes and burdens in Church and State, and then prove... run-aways from Edge Hill, and stumble at the threshold, despising the offer, cancelling our former prayers, scandalising ourselves saying, 'The time is not come, the time the Lord's house should be built', and so wish for Captaines that we might return to Egypt... Might we not fear such another oath of God against us, and such another pilgrimage of ourselves in the wilderness of our own misery, untill our carcasses were all fallen as theirs.⁵²

These sermons are probably indicative of the type that parliamentary ministers also preached within the diocese. They were liable to provoke a royalist backlash in areas where the King's cause was dominant. At the commencement

⁵⁰ T. Lightfoote, *Elias redivivus* (London, 1643), pp.19,40,41.

⁵¹ E. Corbett, *God's Providence: A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons, 28th. December 1642* (London, 1643), pp.29,28,21. Corbett (d.1658) was born at Pontesbury, Shropshire. He had resisted the attempted Laudian innovations at Merton College, Oxford, where he was a fellow, and gave evidence against Laud at his trial. He was one of the assembly of divines at Westminster. *DNB*.

⁵² R.Vines, *Caleb's Integrity in Following the Lord Fully* (London,1643), p.3.

of the Civil War, Vines fled his parish and sought sanctuary in parliamentary Coventry.

Ann Hughes, writing about north Warwickshire, has commented that there is little direct evidence of Puritan ministerial activity in the 1640s, but that if the attention paid by the Royalists to such men as Blake of Tamworth, Burges of Sutton Coldfield and James Nalton of Rugby 'is any indication, [they] played an important part in rallying support to Parliament's side'.⁵³ Nalton, 'a godly and able minister, who hath been twice plundered and in danger of his life' fled to London, and became minister of St. Leonard's, Foote Lane, in 1643.⁵⁴ A few clergy in the diocese actually took up arms. One of these was Nathaniel Barton, of Caldwell, Derbyshire, whose father was rector of Broseley, Shropshire. Arriving at Peterborough in July 1643, he showed his contempt for church artefacts when he 'and Captain Hope, two martial ministers ... [did] break open the Vestrey and take away a Fair Crimson Satten table Cloth, and several other things'.⁵⁵ Joseph Sweetnam, rector of Dalbury (1624) and vicar of All Saints, Derby, lent £32 to Parliament in 1642, and was a captain of horse in the Derby regiment.⁵⁶

Several clergy also acted as chaplains to the parliamentary forces. Nalton ministered to Colonel Grantham's regiment.⁵⁷ William Cook, vicar of Wroxhall, Warwickshire, and former pupil of the non-conformist John Ball of Whitmore, also became a chaplain. A convinced parliamentarian, and praised by Samuel

⁵³ Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.151. The same observation probably applies to Joseph Sound, the vicar of Shifnal, who was also plundered by royalists. Samuel Wills, vicar of Croxhall, moved to London at the outbreak of the War presumably because his type of ministry was uncongenial to the royalists in Staffordshire. He became vicar of St Helen's, Bishopsgate, in 1644 and signed the Presbyterian Testimony in 1648. A. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (Oxford, 1988), pp.451,534-535.

⁵⁴ *H.M.C., Fifth Report*, p.79; Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, pp.360-361.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, p.35.

⁵⁶ T. Brighton, *Royalists and Roundheads in Derbyshire* (Bakewell, 1981), p.45. He later underwent a change of heart, his estates being seized in 1651 because of his participation in an abortive royalist plot.

⁵⁷ Simeon Ashe, who had been vicar of Rugeley, Staffordshire, in 1627 and had been ejected from the living because of his refusal to read the *Book of Sports*, was chaplain the the Earl of Manchester during the War. Sylvester, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, p.42; Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.73.

Bold and Richard Baxter, Cook assisted Baxter for a short time in his mission to the Parliamentary army, though he soon wearied of his unregenerate charges and, on the advice of ministerial colleagues from London, removed to Ashby-de-la-Zouch.⁵⁸

Many Puritan clergy were forced to flee for their beliefs. About thirty fled to Coventry for safety, including Anthony Burges, Clive Brumskill, chaplain to Lady Bromley of Sheriff Hales, Valentine Overton of Bedworth, Tristram Diamond of Coleshill and Richard Baxter from Kidderminster, in the neighbouring diocese of Worcester. Amongst the laymen sheltering in the town were Thomas Hunt and Humphrey Mackworth of Shrewsbury.⁵⁹

Much of the evidence for the Puritan clergy's commitment comes from information about their suffering at the hands of royalists. As we would anticipate, there is similar evidence to document the active support of Laudian clergy for the King's cause. After his release from Parliamentary imprisonment, Bishop Wright returned to Eccleshall, where, as Walker reported, he devoted half his estate to Charles's service.⁶⁰ Samuel Arnaway, made Archdeacon of Coventry in 1641, later joined Charles at Oxford and published a tract arguing that Parliament had effectively destroyed the lawfully established religion of the country, and calling on the uncommitted to support the King.⁶¹ William Higgins, Archdeacon of Derby after the death of Samuel Clerke in 1641, was imprisoned in

⁵⁸ According to Bold, Cook was 'the greatest instance of an indefatigable, faithful minister and practical Believer I was ever acquainted with' constant and consistent in his family devotions, sabbatarian discipline and utter seriousness. S. Bold, *Man's Great Duty* (London, 1693); Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, pp.132-133. Others from the diocese who became Parliamentary army chaplains were Richard Chapman, vicar of Leigh, Staffordshire, Obadiah Grew, master of Atherstone grammar School, John Herring, minister at Coventry and Nathaniel Macham, later pastor at Dunchurch; see A. Laurence, *The Parliamentary Army Chaplains, 1642-1651* (Woodbridge, 1990), *passim*.

⁵⁹ Sylvester, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, p.44.

⁶⁰ Walker is quoting from Lloyd, whose comment needs to be treated with some caution. Lloyd also maintained that Wright was one of the strictest bishops ever to have possessed the see, a man of painfulness, integrity and moderation, and that his virtues 'were such that the vices only and not the Men of the Times, were his enemies'. This characterisation of Wright leans to the over-generous- perhaps his comment about the Bishop's support for Charles is also exaggerated. Quoted from J. Walker, *An Attempt towards Recovering an Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy of the Church of England* (London, 1714), section on Lichfield cathedral.

⁶¹ S. Arnaway, *No Peace till the King Prosper* (Oxford, 1645).

Coventry for three months after the battle of Edgehill, and later taken captive at the surrender of Lichfield Close.⁶²

The connection between conformity or Laudianism and allegiance to the King is also apparent further down the church hierarchy. In 1647, amongst a number of articles brought by the Derbyshire County Committee against George Holmes, rector of Clowne and Breadsall, Holmes was accused of openly supporting Charles, in one instance exhorting Sir Francis Rhodes to send 'Plate and household goods into Wellbecks, and endeavoured to persuade others to lend money to the King'.⁶³

Thomas Lever, vicar of Leamington Hastings, was sequestered for malignancy. Edward Mansell, a royal chaplain and vicar of Stoneleigh, was also sequestered. Parliamentary troops had earlier expressed their contempt by interrupting him in the parish church and firing their pistols.⁶⁴ In the early years of the War, Isaac Martin of Great Bolas, Shropshire, was sturdily anti-Puritan and anti-Parliamentarian. Charged with stirring up the parish to support Prince Rupert, he persuaded the Royalist governor of High Ercall to unroof Bolas Church to prevent the Parliamentary forces from using the building as a garrison.⁶⁵ While Matthew Fowler (vicar of High Ercall in 1644) was at Christ Church, Oxford, Walker states that he had been 'one of the chief of those many scholars that had stood up and valiantly defended the King's cause'. Later, when chaplain to Lord Newport, he was a fervent royalist.⁶⁶ In 1645, John Hill, vicar of Ellastone, Staffordshire, was ejected by the Committee of Plundered Ministers for 'very great malignity'.⁶⁷

The Royalists' forces also included some clerics who felt strongly enough to leave their cures and join themselves to their army. Summoned before the

⁶² Matthews, *Walker Revised*, p.305.

⁶³ Bodleian Library., Walker MS. C 5 52-56; see chapter 7, pp.253-254.

⁶⁴ A. Matthews, *Walker Revised* (Oxford, 1988), p.365.

⁶⁵ Martin must have undergone something of a change of heart. According to Walker, he rather surprisingly signed the 1648 Testimony of Shropshire Presbyterian ministers, *ibid.*, p.306.

⁶⁶ Walker, *Sufferings of the Clergy*.

⁶⁷ Matthews, *Walker Revised*, p.323; see chapter 7, p.249.

Committee for Plundered ministers, Anthony Huxley deserted his Abbots Bromley vicarage and attached himself to the Royalist army, as did Robert Kendricke of Burton Dassett. Hugh Humphries of Longdon, Staffordshire, was reported to have frequented Royalist garrisons and 'been in actual armes ag[ains]t the Parliament'. Thomas Holyoake, rector of Bindingbury, was later a captain of foot in the defence of Oxford.⁶⁸

Both contemporaries and historians have been prone to equate Puritanism with Parliamentaryism. As Richard Baxter recognised, the relationship was not always so straightforward. According to William Bagshawe, the conformist Anthony (?) Mellor, curate of Teddington in the parish of Bakewell, was brought before Quarter Sessions by 'opposers of what they counted Puritanism', accused of being a 'Puritan and a Roundhead'. When asked to explain such terms, they mentioned such practices as family prayer, Mellor's observance of the Sabbath, and his objection to their 'Prophanation of it by Sports and Pastimes'. He was released.⁶⁹

Some Puritan clergy felt uncertain about the political issues dividing the King from Parliament, and were unwilling to take sides. In some cases, however, pressure from their congregations or from royalist troops eventually forced them to do so. One such was John Hieron, lecturer at Ashbourne, and formerly chaplain to Sir Henry Leigh of Egginton, 1630-1633. Charged before the High Commission in 1637 with maintaining that Bishop Wright and Sir Andrew Kniveton 'neither feared God nor honoured the King', Hieron was then accused of being a roundhead, at the outbreak of the Civil War, by some of his congregation, who had been offended by his preaching. Royalist troops raided his house and arrested him, though Hieron protested he had only preached against the excesses of the bishops. He was released, but by 1642 the royalist garrison 'had made life

⁶⁸ Bodleian Library, Minutes Book for the Committee of Plundered Ministers, 324, 67; W.MS C 5 182; 324, 174; Matthews, *Walker Revised*, p.364.

⁶⁹ W.Bagshawe, *De Spiritualibus Peccis* (London, 1702), p.17.

impossible' for Hieron and he fled to safety to Sir John Gell's Parliamentary garrison at Derby.⁷⁰

Immanuel Bourne, despite his 'painful' ministry, friendship with Sir John Gell and sufferings at the Court of High Commission in the 1630s, adopted a neutral position at the start of the War, determining 'to attend to my own parishes and leave them to fight it out, believing the causes of both sides were iustifiable'. His non-partisan stance led to his suffering at the hands of both sides, each of whom demanded money from him. His decision to support Parliament was a reaction to the plundering of the royalists, who 'like demons, destroyed all they came neare and left the poor to starve'. 'As a result, his biographer explains, Bourne and many others began to side with Parliament'⁷¹. He came 'late' to the cause. It was only after Laud's death that he obeyed parliamentary ordinances, ceased to pray for the King in public, and eventually 'accepted a seat on the Commission of Sequestration'. Yet he still failed to please either side, making enemies of his former friends, while some parliamentarians believed him to be a malignant in disguise.⁷² Bourne's case is a reminder that allegiance was not a cut-and-dried affair, that some 'painful' clergy were swayed by events rather than ecclesiology, and that support for Parliament was not always instantaneous at the commencement of the War. It is unlikely that Bourne was a unique case.

A similar predicament faced Richard Clarke, the rector of Ashton-upon-Trent, Derbyshire, except that he was pushed in the opposite direction. Clarke, who was described by a later incumbent as a 'faithful and painful preacher in his parish', combined this with loyalty to the King. At the beginning of the Civil War, 'finding himself too much exposed to the pillaging and insults of the neighbouring Garrison of Derby, and another one nigher home', he found refuge

⁷⁰ Porter, 'Life of Mr. John Hieron', quoted in R.Clark, 'Lists of Derbyshire Clergymen, 1558-1662', *The Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, 104 (1984), pp.10-61.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Derby City Library, Ashover Collection, Letter from Immanuel Bourne, dated 28 August 1646, to William Bourne of Manchester, printed in the 'Derbyshire Times', 28 May, 1910, quoted in R. O'Day, 'Immanuel Bourne: A Defence of the Ministerial Order', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 27 (1976), pp.101-114.

with Sir John Harpur of Swarkston at the royalist garrison of Ashby-de-la-Zouch.⁷³

Preaching and Popular Allegiance

Clarendon declared that the spirit of rebellion had been fomented by the seditious sermons of Puritan divines, and a modern historian, J. T. Cliffe, suggests that Puritan squires, having been exposed to the centrality of the sermon for many years, would have been much more receptive to exhortations from the pulpit than most of their fellow-gentry.⁷⁴ The use of the preaching for political ends was not, however, the preserve of Puritans alone. Clergy supporting both parties worked hard to boost morale among friends, and win over the uncommitted.

The sermon's political purposes can best be seen in those preached to the Houses of Parliament by Vines, Corbett and Burges, who all urged their listeners to continue the work of godly reformation. The exposition of the sacred scriptures combined with a veneration for the pulpit and the preacher's reputation for godliness invested the message with particular authority to a congregation of receptive Protestants. 'We must see what the text holds for us- we must not commit rape or extortion upon the word of God', warned Richard Vines in 1642, before exhorting his Parliamentary audience to 'go on in the work of the Lord' for the reformation of the Church. Such 'prophetic' Parliamentary sermons, emphasising human ability and responsibility, were often published to ensure that their message was disseminated throughout the kingdom. The House ordered Vines' patron, William Purefoy, to thank him officially on its behalf.⁷⁵

The Royalists also used the printing press to disseminate the message of their preachers. In a sermon of 1644, Edward Symmons, chaplain to the 'Life-Guard of the Prince of Wales' preached a sermon at Shrewsbury, 'wherein by the

⁷³ B. W.MSS. C.7.122.

⁷⁴ W.D.Macray (ed.), *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (Oxford, 1988), vol.ii, pp.319-22; J.Cliffe, *Puritans in Conflict* (London, 1988), p.20.

⁷⁵ Vines, *Caleb's Integrity*; J.F.Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament* (Princeton, 1969), pp.198-200, and *passim*.

Word of God, the nature and disposition of a Rebell is discovered, and the King's true souldier described and characterised'. As rebellion was a work of wickedness, and only wicked men pursued it, it followed 'naturally' that 'tis the duty of all good men to oppose Rebellion, and to endeavour the suppression of all Rebellious men'.⁷⁶ In 1645, Samuel Arnaway, the archdeacon of Coventry, published the tract, *No Peace till the King Prosper*, a call to the uncommitted to support the King. Religion itself was under attack, and 'to use that service and Forme of Prayer and Religion established by Law, for which our forefathers dyed Martyrs, is to make us live and suffer as Malefactors'.⁷⁷

The parish pulpit too was used to influence parishioners by both sides. In 1643, Thomas Berry, rector of Norbury, Staffordshire, was ordered to appear before the Committee at Stafford to answer for his misdemeanours in speaking against Parliament. He was charged with preaching malicious doctrine and calling the members usurpers, and imprisoned.⁷⁸ At Audley, Staffordshire, parishioners alleged that William Kelsall, the vicar, Staffordshire, and his son John, who acted as his curate, 'had neglected to pray for the good success of the Parliament forces against the King and to return thanks for the victories obtained'.⁷⁹ Amongst many other offences, George Holmes of Breadsall, it was alleged, had 'usually prayed for the Earle (afterwards Marq[ui]s and Duke) of Newcastle's good success against the Parliaments fforces'.⁸⁰ John Hill, the Vicar of Ellastone, denounced one of his parishioners as a 'Puritan, roundhead and fool', for signing a petition which was sympathetic to Parliament. Edward Lane of West Bromwich continued to conduct services according to the Book of Common Prayer, 'discharging his duty with the fidelity of a loyal subject and with the zeal of a true son of the Church of England', until parliamentary forces entered the church one day,

⁷⁶ E.Symmons, *A Militarie Sermon, preached at Shrewsbury 19 May 1644*.

⁷⁷ Arnaway, *No Peace 'till the King Prosper*.

⁷⁸ D.H.Pennington and I. A.Roots (eds.), *The Committee at Stafford, 1643-1645* (Manchester, 1957).

⁷⁹ B. W. MSS, C.7. 131.

⁸⁰ B. W.MSS, C.5.

contemptuously pulled him out of the reading desk by his ears, and ‘haling him into the churchyard burnt the surplice and Common Prayer before his face.’⁸¹

Clergy also used their influence outside the pulpit. Ithiel Smart and Edward Archer, two ministers previously resident in Staffordshire, published a partisan narrative, describing the downfall of Francis Pitt, who had acted as a go-between on behalf of his landlord, Sir Thomas Leveson, the Catholic Royalist governor of Dudley Castle, and the nearby Parliamentary garrison of Rushall Hall, which Leveson had offered to purchase for £2,000. Pitt was apprehended, brought to London to stand trial before a council of war, and executed at Smithfield in October 1644.⁸² The pamphlet was of the ‘gallows-repentance’ type, and avowed the justice of the parliamentary cause.⁸³ Pitt, from Wednesfield in the parish of Wolverhampton, had committed his crime after back-sliding. Previously ‘wrought-upon’ by Richard Lee, the Wolverhampton preacher, he had had a good reputation amongst the local godly, until he was seduced by ‘the popish party’. When asked by Smart on the scaffold what he thought of Parliament’s cause, he declared that he had always held it to be just, and that he and his family and friends ‘do verily beleieve it to be the cause of God’. Pitt exhorted

⁸¹ B. W.MSS, C.5. 103.

⁸² I.Smart and E. Archer, *A More Exact and Perfect Relation of the Treachery, Apprehension, Conviction, Condemnation, Confession and Execution of Francis Pitt, aged 65* (London, 1644). Ithiel Smart was Puritan vicar of Wombourne. He fled to London in the early years of the war. His co-publisher, Edward Archer, matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1629. Ordained at Lichfield, he was curate at Enville, 1632-1640. Preacher at St. Ethelburga’s, London, in 1643, he became vicar of Leamington in 1645. *CHS*, (1915).

⁸³ See P.Lake, ‘“A Charitable Christian Hatred”: the Godly and their Enemies in the 1630s’, in Durston and Eales, *Culture of English Puritanism*, pp.145-183; *The Arraignment of hypocrisy or a looking glass for murderers and adulterers* (1652); J.Sharpe, ‘“Last Dying Speeches”: Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, no. 107, pp.144-167; *The lives and apprehension, arraignment and execution of Robert Throgmorton, William Porter and John Bishop* (London, 1608); Henry Goodcole, *A true declaration of the happy conversion, contrition and Christian preparation of Francis Robinson, gentleman* (London, 1618). According to Lake, by the 1650s full-scale Puritan conversion narratives were sometimes to be found within conventional murder pamphlets, where the emphasis was placed on the miracle of grace behind the conversion, rather than the crime. ‘The full scale of repentance and sense of assured salvation achieved by the murderer was invoked to demonstrate the truth and spiritual power of a particular, distinctive puritan style of piety and religiosity’. P.Lake, ‘Puritanism, Arminianism and a Shropshire Axe-Murderer’, *Midland History*, 15 (1990), pp.37-64.

parliamentarians to 'go on courageously and know, that you have God for your Captain, and then you cannot but prevail'.

Other clergy promoted their chosen cause by more direct methods.

William and John Kelsall of Audley were both accused of hindering the parish from raising arms for Parliament and furthering the Royalist war effort by raising men and arms for them. In 1645 the pair were still professing their allegiance to the King's party.⁸⁴ George Holmes assisted the Commissioners of Array, threatening those who received or concealed those who fled from the commission. He was open in his condemnation of Parliament, inveighing against the army.⁸⁵ William Thorpe, rector of Matlock and Carsington, was accused of giving a horse and arms for the King's service, while Francis Holyoke of Southam was charged by the Committee for Plundered Ministers with using his services to exhort his parishioners to join the King's forces, declaring that he had arms for them at his house, and encouraging them to this end by appearing in person at the Commission of Array.⁸⁶

It is very difficult to measure the effectiveness of such attempts to sway popular allegiance. Holyoake's efforts appear to have met with some success. Reaching Southam in August 1642, Nehemiah Wharton, the parliamentary soldier, found it was 'a very malignant town, both minister and people. We pillaged the minister, and took from him a drum and several arms'.⁸⁷ Wharton marched on to Coventry, where the parliamentary companies met with an enthusiastic reception. When Richard Baxter arrived, three months later, he described the inhabitants as 'the most religious men of the parts round about'. It would be natural to assume that Coventry's political affiliation was due to the pre-eminence of the local Puritan ministry, but this was not the case. Oldridge maintains it was outside intervention that secured the city 'for the cause of "godly

⁸⁴ B. W. MSS, C.7. 131.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* When someone declared that a two penny halter might serve to hang them all, Holmes replied that a penny halter would serve him.

⁸⁶ Bodleian Library, B324, p.474.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; SP 16/491/133.

religion” at the outbreak of the Civil War’. After the collapse of Laudianism, Puritanism was again in the ascendant, but Coventry’s allegiance was uncertain until August 1642, when ‘there came into this city about 400 of the parliament party from Bermingham & besides many from other parts, so that they prevailed & kept this city’. Once thus secured, it acted as a magnet to clerics and layfolk fleeing Royalist persecution; after his arrival, Baxter claimed to have met thirty ‘worthy ministers’ who sought refuge ‘for safety from soldiers and popular fury’.⁸⁸ These included such Puritan luminaries as Anthony Burgess of Sutton Coldfield, Valentine Overton of Bedworth and Simon Moore of Frankton, an indication that in some places congregations were divided or hostile to a ‘painful’ ministry sympathetic to Parliamentary ecclesiastical reform.⁸⁹

Petitions

Petitions to Parliament, claiming to reflect local religious opinion, also played an important role in 1640-1642 as a means of political and religious persuasion. A two-way process, they were apparently genuine expression of local feeling, designed to influence those in positions of authority, and at the same time instruments used to shape popular opinion in the provinces.

In 1641, Warwickshire was the only county in the diocese to send a root and branch petition to Westminster for the reformation of the Church, a move inspired by the London petition, which condemned the activities and attitudes of the Arminian episcopate, and sought to abolish the episcopal office.⁹⁰ A number of petitions (including representations from Staffordshire and Shropshire) dissenting from this view were sent to Parliament, from late 1640 to May 1642. They are indicative of both ‘a collection of interests from most parts of the

⁸⁸ PRO, SP 16/491/133; Sylvester, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, pp.44-5; D.Oldridge, ‘Conflict within the Established Church in Warwickshire’ (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1992), pp. 270-1, 273-4, 324.

⁸⁹ Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.144,

⁹⁰ Shaw, *History of the English Church*, p.26; A Fletcher, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (Sevenoaks, 1981), pp. 92-3.

country eager to construct a spirited defence of the established church' and differences in ecclesiology amongst the influential laity within the diocese. Judith Maltby remarks that, 'Delighted to see the practitioners of "Thorough" punished for a decade of liturgical innovation and prelacy inflicted on the "pure church of Elizabeth and James", the petitioners sought to reclaim and defend the two main bulwarks of the church, episcopacy and Common Prayer, from the taint of Laudianism'.⁹¹ The two petitions from the diocese defending the Prayer Book are both derivative. The one from Shropshire repeated phrases from the Cheshire and Worcestershire petitions, while the Staffordshire petition was identical to one which originated in Herefordshire, apart from the omission of a single clause.⁹²

The Shropshire petition defended the pre-Laudian Church as conforming to the Church established under Elizabeth.⁹³ Seeking to underline the English Church's communion with the Calvinist churches in Europe, and to influence a Calvinist parliament to leave well alone, the petitioners declared that the Thirty-Nine Articles accorded with the confessions of all the reformed churches, who also approved of the Book of Common Prayer and the episcopate.⁹⁴ The chief honour of the episcopate was as guardian and protector of the Protestant tradition, the very tradition that the Shropshire petitioners had 'bin bredd up in'.⁹⁵

The Staffordshire petition was mainly the work of two Herefordshire clergymen, Mason the vicar of Yazor, and Sherburn, rector of Pembridge.⁹⁶ It asked Parliament to re-establish and confirm Prayer Book worship, which was 'agreeable to God's holy Word, and purest antiquity' and had been established by

⁹¹ Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998), p.84.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp.86-7; Sir Thomas Aston, *A Collection of Sundry Petitions Presented to the King's Most Excellent Majestie* (London, 1642), pp.25-6, 39-40. The clause missing from the Staffordshire petition was 'that Cathedrals, the Monuments of our Forefathers Charity, the reward of present Literature and furtherance of Piety, bee also continued'. Its omission probably indicates the lack of respect in which the Lichfield cathedral hierarchy was held by an influential section of Staffordshire laity.

⁹³ Maltby, *Prayer Book and People*, p.126.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.117; Nottingham University Library PW2/HY/173.

⁹⁵ Maltby, *Prayer Book and People*, p.107.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.93; from J Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads: the Harleys of Brompton Bryan and the Outbreak of the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.128-9.

‘godly acts of Parliament’. The petitioners also asked that episcopacy be maintained by the great authority of Parliament. Like the Shropshire supplication, the episcopate was portrayed as the preserver of the Reformation, the ‘Plantation and Preservation of Truth, glorious for late martyrdoms’.⁹⁷ In more recent years the episcopate had been renowned for its success ‘against that Hydra of Heresies, the Roman Papacy’. This had particular resonance in the county, for Bishop Morton had been engaged for many years in polemical conflict with Rome. The petitioners believed that all exorbitances within the Church had originated from the infirmity and corruption of men rather than the nature of the episcopal office itself.⁹⁸

There is no indication of the number of supporters from Shropshire, but the Staffordshire petition claimed that it was subscribed by 3,000 of the ‘best quality of the county’.⁹⁹ Many petitions began at, or were approved by meetings of the county community at Quarter Sessions or the Assizes. Perhaps it was on such occasions in Shropshire and Staffordshire that it was agreed to adopt petitions from other counties, an indication of some theological collusion across county boundaries.

The petitions are written in language acceptable to a Calvinist Parliament. This may indicate the reformed sympathies of the petitioners, or may have been designed to make such requests more palatable to the recipients. As Lake observes, of a different subject, ‘it demonstrates local agents having learned the polemical idiom current at the centre, couching their applications for central aid in ideological terms likely to attract the favourable attention of the regime’.¹⁰⁰ However, while the petitions show no sympathy with Arminianism, they reveal a

⁹⁷ An allusion to those bishops who had been martyred for their faith. It linked the martyred church fathers, such as Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Iraenaeus of Lyons and Cyprian of Carthage with the Marian bishops, Hooper of Worcester and Gloucester, Ridley of London and Archbishop Cranmer. An account of these martyrdoms is found in Foxe and links the Marian reformers to the apostles, underlining the apostolic foundations of the Church of England.

⁹⁸ Aston, *Collection of Sundry Petitions*, pp.25-6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Lake, ‘Shropshire Axe Murderer’, p.50. See also Bishop Wright’s speech to Parliament, above, p.285.

view of the Church very different from that of the more ardent Puritans. The image of an elect remnant managing to survive in a compromised Church was replaced by a national Church under whose wings of prayer-book liturgy and episcopal government the faithful might find shelter. As Anthony Fletcher maintains, 'in late 1641-1642 petitions made plain that the notion of *Ecclesia Anglicana* which embodied a middle way and was equally resistant to Romish superstition and Genevan innovation, had stuck deep roots'.¹⁰¹ Maltby suggests that the attack on the Church of England in the period immediately before the Civil War 'created a sense of "group identity" among conformists that had been lacking before'. Like Puritanism, it appears that conformity also changed in response to events. The petitions from Shropshire and Staffordshire are evidence that when the church was under threat, affection for what was seen as its praiseworthy attributes (its liturgy and government) was strengthened.

Anthony Fletcher argues that the county petitions of 1642 were expressions of deeply-felt local opinion but that their organisers also saw them as rallying-points.¹⁰² In the face of division within the county communities, petitions were, in part, an endeavour to retain a sense of unity.¹⁰³ In the case of the Derbyshire petition, the close link between Sir John Gell and his like-minded half-brother, Sir John Curzon, contributed to its success. The content of a petition was discussed locally before it was formulated. At Derby, a preliminary meeting to discuss it was held at the *White Hart*, and in Staffordshire the subscription list was headed by 12 J.P.s and 17 Grand Jurymen who had given their assent to its contents at the Assizes.¹⁰⁴ The numbers subscribing could be very impressive. The Derbyshire list contained the names or marks of 7,077; that of Shropshire

¹⁰¹ Fletcher, *Outbreak of the Civil War*, pp.288-289.

¹⁰² With regard to the Warwickshire petition, however, Ann Hughes comments that, because of Brooke's lack of contacts with the leaders of Warwickshire society, the petition was probably organised by his own supporters in the county, or in London. Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.136. If so, it may be misleading as an indication of Warwickshire opinion, but it does show how the political and religious situation now provided an opportunity for local leaders with anti-Catholic and Puritan views to air them forcefully on the national stage.

¹⁰³ Fletcher, *Outbreak*, pp.192-3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.193-4.

contained 10,000.¹⁰⁵ By his authority as a J.P., Sir John Gell could utilise the services of the Derbyshire constables to obtain subscriptions, but the collection of names was usually organised by the parochial clergy. Immanuel Bourne headed the list for Ashover and at Beeley (also in Derbyshire) the minister noted that his flock willingly consented to register its support for the county petition.¹⁰⁶ In an age of seigneurial and clerical pre-eminence, however, it would have been more difficult not to comply with the request for a signature- acquiescence may not always have denoted either complete agreement, or a grasp of the issues involved.

The 1642 county petitions exhorted Parliament to root out popery, as well as evil counsellors, and to defend and reform the Church. Nevertheless, as Fletcher has argued, such requests were essentially conservative, and to be differentiated from the Root and Branch petitions of the previous year by their moderation. They put forward 'the authentic Elizabethan programme of reform, restoring the twin foundations of Sabbatarianism and preaching', declaring their support for Parliament without disclaiming loyalty to the King.¹⁰⁷ Many argued that the changes of the 1630s had threatened true religion, undermining the Protestant foundations of the Church and state. This view was evident in both the Warwickshire petition and Derbyshire petitions. According to *The Two Petitions of the County of Warwick and Coventry*, the Warwickshire petition, delivered to both Houses of Parliament by 'many hundreds of the gentry and freeholders', gave thanks for the Grand Remonstrance.¹⁰⁸ Also thanking the Commons for their

¹⁰⁵ A.J.Fletcher, 'Petitioning and the Outbreak of the Civil War in Derbyshire', *The Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, 93 (1973), p.34; *idem*, *Outbreak*, p.195.

¹⁰⁶ R. O'Day, 'Immanuel Bourne', pp.101-114.

¹⁰⁷ Fletcher regards the county petitions of 1642 as essentially evasive-an escape from political reality, in favour of a balanced constitution and mixed monarchy, rather than a 'constructivist wrestling with the constitutional dilemmas of the moment'. Fletcher, *Outbreak*, p.227.

¹⁰⁸ *The Two Petitions of the County of Warwick and Coventry* (1642), B.L. E135 (27). The Remonstrance, which Parliament delivered to Charles at Hampton Court in December 1641, was 'a progress report, an agenda for action' and a statement of common political aims: the restoration of 'the ancient honour, greatness and security of this crown and nation'. It saw a design to subvert 'the fundamental laws and principles of government, upon which the religion and government of this kingdom are firmly established' through the work of the 'malignant party', who included Jesuitised Papists, the Bishops and the corrupt part of the clergy, who 'cherish formality and superstition as the natural effects and more probable supports of their own tyranny and usurpation'. The malignants had sought to suppress the purity and power of religion. Seeking to

undaunted courage, the petitioners urged the House to continue its work of reformation, to remove Catholics from the Lords and replace scandalous ministers with godly and painful counterparts.¹⁰⁹ The county, which had petitioned for root and branch reform of the Church in 1641, did not repeat the request in 1642. However, Staffordshire, which had not joined the previous campaign, asked that the Church's government, officers and worship be ordered solely according to the Scriptures, 'the particular accommodation of which we wee humbly leave to the wisdom of this Honourable House to determine, by the assistance of an Assembly of godly and learned Divines'.¹¹⁰

Many of the instigators and supporters of these petitions, in the provinces and in Parliament, were from the godly fraternity. The same may be said of the 1642 *Protestation*, an oath for the defence of the true reformed Protestant religion and the liberties of the subject, which all adult males were directed to take. Ministers, churchwardens and constables were instructed in the necessary procedures for the oath-taking, which was usually done after a Sunday service.¹¹¹

Ian Green has emphasised that, because of the attention given to Puritans and Arminians, there is a tendency to forget that the profession as a whole was a conformable body, largely dependent on compliance to secure promotion. Trained in a conservative academic mode, its members tended to concentrate on the positive attributes of the Church- its stability, comprehensiveness and moderation- rather than its demerits. Many felt threatened by, and were suspicious of the proceedings of the Long Parliament, and looked to the King for

encourage those parties (these included the Arminians) who were helpful to their ends, the malignants endeavoured to drive a wedge between 'common Protestants and those whom they call Puritans' by enlarging their differences. The Remonstrance was heavily anti-Laudian, and sought to deprive the bishops of their vote in the Lords and to take away 'such oppressions in religion, church, government and discipline, as have been brought in and fomented by them'. It described the High Commission as 'not much less than the Romish Inquisition'. S.R.Gardiner, *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution, 1628-1660* (Oxford, 1889), pp.129,131,138.

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.135-6.

¹¹⁰ Fletcher, *Outbreak*, 191-227; *Staffordshire Petition, To the Honourable, the Knights, Citizens and Burgesses of the Commons House of Parliament* (1642), E 147, no.17.

¹¹¹ Fletcher, *Outbreak*, p.209.

leadership.¹¹² Faced with the Protestation Oath of 1642, Christopher Harvey, the minister of Clifton-on-Dunsmore, Warwickshire reworded it, informing the local J.Ps. that he would maintain Parliament's privileges only 'so far as I am, or shall be, rightly informed what they are'.¹¹³ With their work in supporting the petitions in favour of episcopacy and the liturgy, and sometimes resisting the Protestation, Fletcher maintains that such conforming clergy 'prepared the ground for their main role as the storm troopers of the King's cause in the localities'.¹¹⁴

The Role of Anti-Catholicism

Fear and distrust of popery were part of the English Protestant tradition. Such feelings were exacerbated in the period 1640-1642, which was marked by rumours of popish plots against the state and Protestant religion.¹¹⁵ There were rumours of conspiracies throughout the country, and although committed Catholics may have comprised as few as 2% of the population, it was 'the immense shadow and not the substance of English Catholicism which frightened Protestants'. National anxieties were exacerbated by particular local circumstances. Catholicism tended to be seigneurial, so that local pockets of recusancy gave an illusory impression of numerical strength. At times of political stress, uneasiness over Catholic neighbours was likely to harden into a suspicion that they were preparing to rebel, and signs of unusual conviviality were interpreted as signs of imminent revolt.¹¹⁶

¹¹² I.Green, 'Career Prospects and Clerical Conformity in the Early Stuart Church', *Past and Present*, 90 (1981), pp.71-115.

¹¹³ H.L.R.O., Main Papers, 29th. March 1642: Petition of Christopher Harvey.

¹¹⁴ Fletcher, *Outbreak*, p.291.

¹¹⁵ Sharpe suggests that the spectre of popish fears may have been raised in part through the ascendancy of the Queen's faction at court, in which Catholics predominated, fostering fears of a popish plot and Catholic invasion. Such anxieties were strengthened by the international situation and Scottish propaganda, which represented the Bishops' War as being promoted by papists and crypto-papists and suggested the assault on the Kirk was a prelude to the eradication of orthodoxy in England. K.Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (Oxford,1992), pp.842-844.

¹¹⁶ R.Clifton, 'The Popular Fear of Catholicism During the English Revolution', *Past and Present*, 52, pp.23-55; *idem.*, 'Fear of Popery', in C.Russell (ed.), *Origins of the English Civil War* (Basingstoke, 1973), pp. 144-167; R. Sibbes, *Works*, vol. ii, p.42.

Evidence of this phobia can be found within the diocese. Local Protestants anticipated papist uprisings both within its borders and from outside. In the early weeks of the Long Parliament, Sir John Gell received information that Catholics in the Lichfield area were collecting ‘hatchets and such instruments of death prepared for mischief’. Two men were brought before the justices and confessed that ‘they had bespoken 38 hatchets apiece’, but Gell’s informant claimed they had ‘bespoke 200 at the least’, intended for ‘some massacre this next Wednesday being fast day’.¹¹⁷ There were several reports of conspiratorial behaviour among local Catholics, and after the Army Plot of 1641, numbers were rumoured to be assembling in woods in Shropshire. On being informed, by a shepherd, of an open-air mass at Mow Cop, local Protestants felt sufficiently threatened to arm themselves and arrest most of the participants.¹¹⁸

After the Irish rebellion, *Diurnall Occurences* carried a report of Staffordshire Protestants who were so fearful of a popish plot that when they gathered for worship they did not dare to go to church unarmed.¹¹⁹ News of the insurrection spread from town to town and caused panic everywhere. Lichfield warned Leicester of the impending catastrophe and Bridgnorth received its “information” from Kidderminster. The corporation manuscripts of Bridgnorth record the expenses entailed in keeping watch on the night of the expected Catholic uprising:

For beere for the Bayliffes and others attending them that night when a great watch was kept in this town, the 19th. November, upon a rumor of the papistes rysinge that night through the Kingdome, although, God be prayseed for it, it was not soe, 1s. 3d. To Humphrey Parkes For halfe a tonne of coales for a great fire that watch night which was made nere the cross, in the high street of this Town, 3s. 6d.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ *HMC*; 9th. Report, Pole-Gell MSS, App II, p.391.

¹¹⁸ *Strange Newes from Stafford-shire* (London, 4 June, 1642).

¹¹⁹ *HMC*, 14th. Report, App. II, Portland, MSS p.69; Clifton, ‘Popular Fear of Catholicism’, pp.27,29; *Diurnall Occurences* (London, 1641), pp.5-6.

¹²⁰ Clifton, ‘Popular Fear’, p.30; *H.M.C.*, 10th. Report, Appendix iv, pp.433-434.

Fears were rekindled when Adam Courtney, an armed Catholic who refused to disclose his business, was captured in Staffordshire on November 27th. In Warwickshire in the same month, the Lord Keeper informed the inhabitants that the county was about to be put to the sword and flame by the papists. Though the information turned out to be false, several members of the Catholic Sheldon family were summoned for questioning.¹²¹ At Shrewsbury the town walls were repaired, and in January 1642, the Corporation resolved that the 'towns ordinances shall be tried, and if they prove sound then to be stocked anewe; also foure newe cast iron ordinances to be broughte and £20 to be paid for that purpose'. Fearful of supposed Catholic sedition, the inhabitants petitioned Parliament asking that the county be put into a posture of defence. Presented in March 1642, the petition had been a response to the perception that the activities of local Catholics were making others afraid to go to church.¹²² Troops on their way to Ireland in March were stopped by a Stafford man, Walter Hill, who wished them God's speed in their fight against the common enemy, and tried to enlist their help against local Catholics, such as Lord Aston, 'Mr. Fowler and Mr. Giffard'.¹²³

The machinations of local Catholics were reported far beyond the confines of the diocese. *A Bloody Plot* related the alleged scheming of Thomas Needham, a recusant gentleman, who, having 'gotten unto him many of the same profession', had hidden 34 barrels of gunpowder in a vault under the Derbyshire parish church of Bingley, which he intended to ignite when the parishioners assembled for Sunday worship. In January 1642, the plot was discovered by the sexton, who apprehended Needham's servant, John Simmonds. Brought before a J.P., Simmonds acknowledged Needham's part in the proceedings and implicated others. The plotters fled, although a search of their homes revealed quantities of arms.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.135.

¹²² *C.J.*, ii, p.469. The following May, further steps were taken to ensure the protection of the town. Beaumont, *T.S.A.S.*, vol.LI, p.13.

¹²³ SRO, Q/SR Epiphany 1642 f.26.

¹²⁴ Anon, *A Bloody Plot* (London, 1642).

The petitions received by Parliament in the early months of 1642 also provide 'massive evidence of a new determination to combat and root out popery'.¹²⁵ A common theme was support for a 'full and complete reformation', a process being thwarted by the 'malignant party', at the heart of which were papists. The Irish rebellion indicated the true nature of Catholicism. According to the Staffordshire petition, 'The insurrection of the papists may be reckoned of not only as a rebellion but as a horrid persecution of Christ in his truth and members'. On their journey to the capital, those responsible for presenting the Warwickshire petition were fearful of a large-scale Catholic uprising, but later heartened by news of bills for the relief of Ireland, and the removal of the bishops from the Lords and other secular positions. Derbyshire requested that efforts should be made to discover and root out church papists. Apparently triggered by the 'insolencies and robberies' of troops on the way to Chester, the Shropshire petition ascribed such crimes to popishly affected volunteers.¹²⁶

Fear of imminent papist revolt was expressed individually as well as corporately. In March 1642, Thomas Boughey petitioned the Lords, providing information on his near neighbour, Sir John Peasall. Boughey alleged that 'of late many hundreds of noted recusants have resorted to Sir John's house and his servants have brought home the greatest part of the provisions brought in any market near, much more than can be expended by his domestic servants'. Boughey prayed for action to suppress the 'tumultuous meetings of these recusants'. In the same month the Commons took steps to disarm Staffordshire Catholics.¹²⁷

The diocese was thus very receptive to the rumours of Catholic plots which spread through the Kingdom in 1640-1642. As Clifton maintains, they never became controlling fears because the alarms were essentially local. They died down after they failed to materialise, and so did not initiate a nation-wide

¹²⁵ Fletcher, *Outbreak*, pp.211,213.

¹²⁶ Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, pp.135-6; Fletcher, *Outbreak*, pp.212,216.

¹²⁷ *H.M.C., 5th Report*, p.13; BL. Harl. M.S. 480, fol.39r.

massacre of Catholics. Nevertheless, anti-Catholicism remained a key and pervasive current. Fear of popery was a driving force behind the sermons of Vines and Burges. Preaching before the Commons on 5 November 1644, Burges enjoined his hearers not to lose heart, but rather to execute the judgment of the Lord on the popish foe: 'Make no friendship with angry men, much less with bloody men. Rather dye by them than ever be reconciled with them'. Blessing God for previous victories and deliverances, Burges declared 'you have many fifts of November in this one day; and every time you have a victory it is a deliverance from a gun-powder plot; before it was secret, and now it is open.'¹²⁸

Burges's crusading call to Parliament was a national call which had also been preached locally. Early in 1643, Lord Brooke sought to inculcate a similar sense of mission in a speech to his captains and commanders at Warwick Castle. The Civil War had forced people to fight for the defence of God's true religion and his men were to see the struggle in both local and cosmic terms. All that was precious was under attack from the Popish malignants, who were seeking 'a passage to their ambitions through the entrails of their mother the Commonwealth'. The King had to be delivered from an army of 'notorious Papists or Popishly affected persons'.¹²⁹ Brooke's influence extended far beyond Warwick Castle; the castle itself had been frequented by Puritan ministers from both the diocese of Worcester and Coventry. Brooke was a friend of Purefoy and other Warwickshire Puritan gentry, and he was also a force to be reckoned with in national politics.¹³⁰

Fear of popery was part of the Englishman's Protestant heritage, held by godly believers and church Protestants alike, a resource to be drawn on when required, yet only a controlling fear for those who saw it as the anti-Christ against

¹²⁸ A Burges, *Rome's Cruelty and Apostacie declared in a sermon* (London, 1645).

¹²⁹ R. Greville, *A worthy Speech made by the Right Honourable, the Lord Brooke at the election of his Captains and Commanders at Warwick Castle* (London, 1643).

¹³⁰ Simeon Ashe was, for a time, chaplain at the Castle, and visitors included William Overton and John Ball of Madeley. Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.73. Brooke was killed by Sir Richard Dyott's brother at the siege of Lichfield, in 1643.

whom the elect were predestined to fight and conquer. For such people, as Morrill has commented, 'the deeper the perception of a Popish plot ... the greater [was] the need to push forward to complete the Reformation, to fall in with God's will that His work be done'.¹³¹ Those who saw Catholicism as a threat but parliamentary rebellion as a greater danger were not so convinced, and gravitated to the King and the established order. The strength of an individual's anti-papery was indicative of his future political allegiance, and probably did much to determine it. Sir Walter Wrottesley of Wolverhampton was a decided anti-Catholic. In 1642 he was involved in a fierce contention with Thomas Leveson of Wolverhampton, attempting to prevent him from obtaining arms, as an 'active and dangerous recusant'. In the 1630s Wrottesley had had a Puritan chaplain, Samuel Wills.¹³² Yet Wrottesley perceived the danger from Catholicism (the motor which drove the Parliamentary side?) to be less than need to preserve the established order; his anti-Catholicism did not override this allegiance, and he eventually supported the King.¹³³ Bridgnorth, beset by Catholic fears in 1641, also declared for the King, as did the Whitmores, local gentry who had donated a living to the feoffees for impropriations in the early years of Charles's reign. Shrewsbury and Lichfield, both jittery about popish plots, were later held for the King.

Moreover, some of those who voiced anti-Catholic sentiments before 1640 may have been motivated more by greed than fear. Sir Thomas Glemham and Sir John Powlett rode the anti-papery bandwagon in 1639 when they informed the King that Peter Giffard of Chillington, Wolverhampton had constantly received into his home 'in a public manner, Roman papistical priests, where he has been partaker of the mass'. When Giffard was indicted, his estates fell to the King's

¹³¹ Morrill is referring to radical godly M.P.s, but the description also has a wider application. For such, 'the struggle against papacy was matched by the struggle for the new Jerusalem'. Morrill, 'The attack on the Church', p.117.

¹³² Wills was educated at Christ's College, Cambridge. Vicar of Croxall, Staffordshire, in 1637, he moved to London at the outbreak of the Civil War, becoming vicar of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, in 1644. He signed the testimony in 1648. Matthews, *Calamy Revised*.

¹³³ J.T. Pickles, 'Studies in Royalism in the English Civil Wars, 1642-1646, with special reference to Staffordshire'. University of Manchester M.A., 1968, pp.55-57; G. Wrottesley, 'A History of the Family of Wrottesley of Wrottesley', *CHS*, new series, vi (1903), p.314n; see below, pp.321.

disposal, and Glemham and Powlett asked to compound for the estate.¹³⁴

Glemham was later royalist governor in turn of York, Carlisle and Oxford.¹³⁵

The Allegiance of the Catholic Gentry

What of the Catholic gentry themselves? They had many reasons to fear and dislike the Puritans at Westminster, but were they enough to secure their active support for a King who had done very little to help them in the 1620s and 1630s? Keith Lindley has argued that the overwhelming majority saw political quietism as their safest course in the Civil War, a view endorsed by D.F. Mosler, in an article on Warwickshire Catholics during this period.¹³⁶ They have been criticised by Peter Newman, who contends that this emphasis on neutrality seriously underestimates the contribution Catholics made to Charles's army. Rather than seeing Catholics in arms as a proportion of their part of the overall community, he believes it is more valuable to see them as a proportion of all those in arms for the royalist cause in any given county.¹³⁷ Charles Carlton, despite maintaining that most Catholics tried to remain neutral, nevertheless states that they fought for the King in 'disproportionately high numbers', a proportion that increased with social status.¹³⁸ What was the situation in the diocese?

From an overview of the Catholic gentry, there is evidence that some actively supported the Royalist war effort. In Staffordshire, several leading Catholic families were to be found on the King's side. According to Pennington and Roots, in the initial stages of the Civil War, 'religion certainly played an

¹³⁴ S.P. 16/437/62; G. Wrottesley, 'Giffards from the Conquest to the Present Time', *CHS*, new series, v (1902), pp.174-177.

¹³⁵ P.R. Newman, *Royalist Officers in England and Wales* (New York, 1981), p.158.

¹³⁶ K.Lindley, 'The Part Played by the Catholics', in B.Manning (ed.), *Politics, Religion and the Civil War* (London, 1973), pp.127-178; D.F. Mosler, 'Warwickshire Catholics in the Civil War', *Recusant History*, 15:4 (1980), pp.259-264.

¹³⁷ P.Newman, 'Catholic Royalist Activities in the North, 1642-1646', *Recusant History*, 14 (1977-78), pp.26-38; *idem.*, 'Catholic Royalists of Northern England, 1642-1645', *Northern History*, 15 (1979); *idem.*, 'Roman Catholic Royalists: Papist Commanders under Charles I and Charles II, 1642-1660', *Recusant History*, 16 (1982-1983) pp.396-405.

¹³⁸ C.Carlton, *The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638-1651* (London, 1992), p.290.

important part in one respect: there was a great strain of recusancy in the county, and inevitably the papists were inclined to support the King rather than Parliament'. Members of the Lanes of Bentley, the Giffords of Chillington, the Talbots and the Fowlers took up arms for the King.¹³⁹ Amongst other local Catholics Sir John Fitzherbert of Norbury raised a regiment of horse and some dragoons in 1642.¹⁴⁰ Thomas Morgan, of Weston-under-Weatherly, Warwickshire, was also quick to enlist under the King's banner. An officer, he was killed at the battle of Newbury in 1643.¹⁴¹ In Bridgnorth, Francis Paule, a prominent local Catholic, made his allegiance to the King plain when he denounced a local alderman and his wife as active Parliamentarians. Fearing for the security of the town, he complained 'we have too many of this faction ... who daily send and go betwixt Coventry and our town, so that if some speedy course be not undertaken for the securing of them, we shall all be undone'.¹⁴²

Sometimes there were special reasons for such open commitment. Sir Thomas Leveson of Wolverhampton was already a staunch Royalist before the outbreak of hostilities. In April 1642, the Commons had moved to have a *ne exeat regnum* drawn against him, because of his insults to the deputy lieutenants of Staffordshire. The following October he converted St. Peter's, Wolverhampton, into a garrison for the King. In the same month he became governor of Dudley Castle, and later attempted to bribe the Parliamentary garrison at Rushall Hall to surrender.¹⁴³ Peter Giffard's support may have been due to Charles's earlier sympathy for his financial plight. Giffard had compounded with the Recusancy Commissioners to pay £180 *per annum* in lieu of monthly fines. Still liable to

¹³⁹ D.H.Pennington and I.Roots (eds.), *The Committee at Stafford, 1643-1645* (Manchester, 1957), p.xvii.

¹⁴⁰ Newman, *Royalist Officers in England and Wales*, p.132. He narrowly escaped from Stafford in February 1643.

¹⁴¹ Mosler, 'Warwickshire Catholics in the Civil War', pp. 259-264; *V.C.H., Warwickshire*, vol.6, pp.249,252.

¹⁴² W.J.Farrow, *The Great Civil War in Shropshire* (Shrewsbury, 1926), p.23.

¹⁴³ G.P.Mander, *The Wolverhampton Antiquary* (Wolverhampton,1938), p.311; Newman, *Royalist Officers*, p.231, I. Smart and E. Archer, *A More Exact and Perfect Relation of the Treachery ... of Francis Pitt* (London, 1644).

penalties for harbouring priests and hearing mass, he petitioned the King, who referred judgment to the Barons of the Exchequer, asking to be informed whether Giffard was liable to the penalties. In the meantime he recommended that the proceedings against Giffard be held in abeyance. According to Wrottesley, 'in all his troubles on account of his religion, the King appears to have taken his part and done the most he could for him, and this, perhaps, accounts for the enthusiasm with which he took up the cause of the King during the Civil War'.¹⁴⁴

Another 'incentive' to declare for the King was Charles's willingness to use all those who would aid him, irrespective of religious affiliation, an option not open to Parliament. In 1642 he wrote to the Earl of Newcastle from Shrewsbury, commanding him to utilise all his subjects without examining their consciences 'more than their loyalty to us'.¹⁴⁵ Some Catholics' support may have been based on a recognition that if the King won they would at least be faced with the lesser of two evils; others, like some of their Protestant peers, may have rallied to the cause as landowners to support the status quo. 'In a crisis they would support the government against armed rebellion- a predictable response of wealthy landowners who would otherwise had had no particular interest in the war. Self-protection was the reason for their royalism and neutrality'.¹⁴⁶ Whatever the causes of their loyalty the figures for Catholic army officers from the diocese were relatively high. Of eighty-three royalist officers who, achieved the rank of major or higher, thirteen were Catholics, six of them from Staffordshire, five from Derbyshire and two from Warwickshire: over 15% of the diocesan total- proportionally far in excess of the estimated Catholic population, and almost

¹⁴⁴ Wrottesley, 'Giffards from the Conquest', pp.174-177. Vane was equally sympathetic. In March, 1640, having received a copy of Giffard's composition for recusancy, he expressed his surprise that 'Giffard should be much troubled for transgressing penal statutes made against Recusants, seeing that he pays to the King the greatest rents of any Recusant save two or three'. SP 16/448/16.

¹⁴⁵ Macray (ed.), *History of the Rebellion, 1642-1644*, vol.i, p.36.

¹⁴⁶ Pickles, 'Studies in Royalism', p.212.

exactly corresponding to the percentage of Catholic officers who held field and regimental commands throughout England and Wales in the period 1642-1660.¹⁴⁷

Despite this, plenty of other Catholics did not give active support to the King, or did so only slowly. According to Ann Hughes, of a total of 288 Warwickshire gentry, 18 were Catholics. Eleven attended the Commission of Array, but the sequestration papers of 8 of them made no reference to delinquency. There were two Catholics in Dugdale's list of neutrals, and although one was later accused of royalism, both were later sequestered for recusancy only.¹⁴⁸ Of the total of 61 Catholics sequestered for the county, only eight were charged with delinquency, which may indicate that only the wealthiest declared for the King, although the figure may conceal those whose delinquency had been overlooked, and Catholics of lower social status who supported Charles.¹⁴⁹

Catholics who failed to rally to the King, or gave him their belated support may have been influenced by personal circumstances or personalities lost to the historian. For some, the most comprehensive explanation of neutrality was that they had nothing positive to gain by supporting either side.¹⁵⁰ As in Warwickshire, the early returns of the Committee for Compounding and those of the sequestration solicitors Thorley and Sankey of 1648 for Staffordshire reveal that there were a considerable number of Catholics who remained neutral.¹⁵¹ However, two general causes for such behaviour are apparent. Catholics were more likely to be recruited in areas where the King's forces were already strong. In Staffordshire, according to Pickles, the military division of the county may

¹⁴⁷ Newman, *Royalist Officers*, *passim*. The officers were Oliver Fitzwilliam, Richard Fleetwood, Walter Gifford, Christopher Heveningham, Thomas Leveson and Edward Stamford of Staffordshire; Rowland Eyre, William Eyre, William Fitzherbert, Charles Kirk and Francis Talbot of Derbyshire and John Knightley and Anthony Skinner of Warwickshire; *idem*, 'Roman Catholic Royalists', pp.401-2.

¹⁴⁸ A. Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, p.167.

¹⁴⁹ Mosler, 'Warwickshire Catholics', pp.260-1.

¹⁵⁰ Pickles, 'Studies in Royalism', p.198.

¹⁵¹ CHS, 1915, Appendix iii, 'Catholic Landowners in 1648', pp.389-392. Amongst the Staffordshire gentry who compounded for rents during the war and were declared as recusants only were William Fitzherbert of Swynnerton, Walter Heveningham of Aston, Peter Macclesfield of Maer, Sir Thomas Fleetwood of Caldwich and Wooton, and Thomas Petre, son of William, Lord Petre of Lapley.

have been the decisive factor in Catholic allegiance, explaining neutrality in areas of Parliamentary dominance. Those reported for recusancy alone were more numerous in Parliamentary areas, signifying that Catholicism by itself was not a strong enough motive for Royalism where property was under immediate threat. During the war the royalists raised their troops mostly from the south of the county, where the concentration of Catholics was high (in parishes such as Brewood, Handsworth and Wolverhampton) and this would account for their disproportionate numbers.¹⁵²

Catholics who were belatedly pushed into the royalist fold were often responding to pressure from antagonistic parliamentarians. There was a tendency to look to the King and his garrisons for protection from anti-Catholic zeal. Early in 1643, the County Committee at Stafford recorded that George Walker, of Weston-on-Trent, had 'secured himself under the power of the enemy'. Later in the war, John Gifford of Wolverhampton and Richard Palyn of Derndale were amongst those who fled for safety to the royalists at Dudley Castle.¹⁵³ Despite his prominence within Derbyshire, Rowland Hassop of Eyre, was slow to ally himself openly to the King's cause.¹⁵⁴ He had been one of the two Derbyshire collectors of the special Catholic contribution for the Scottish War, which was organised in the Queen's name, and some of his Catholic relations were early supporters of the Royalist cause.¹⁵⁵ However, it was not until late 1643 that Eyre abandoned his neutrality, seemingly constrained by events rather than ideology. His decision was due, in part, to the presence in Derbyshire of the royalist Newcastle in November, and in part to the pressure imposed on papists and malignants by the

¹⁵² Pickles, 'Studies in Royalism', chapter 3, 'An analysis of the Staffordshire Royalists. Religious Structure', *passim*.

¹⁵³ Pennington and Roots, *Committee at Stafford*, pp.51-2, 265; PRO, SP 23, vol. 136, pp.183-4.

¹⁵⁴ He had married Anne, the daughter of Sir Francis Smith of Ashby Folville and Wooton Wawen in 1625. According to Rosamond Meredith this brought him 'into contact with some of the "best" recusant families of the south Midlands and Home Counties'. He was convicted of recusancy in 1638, and, with his mother, paid an annual yearly composition of £200. R. Meredith, 'A Derbyshire Family in the Seventeenth Century: the Eyres of Hassop and their Forfeited Estate', *Recusant History*, vol. 8 (1965-1966), pp. 12-77.

¹⁵⁵ His nephews, Walter Fowler and Francis Biddulph and his sister's father-in-law, Sir Richard Fleetwood, bart., of Wooton and Calwich, all of Staffordshire, were in arms for the King, 1642-3.

County Committee. Sir John Gell's arbitrary proceedings, and the activities of John Bubnell in the sequestrations led to 'violent retaliation...by Eyre and his friends, who were thus thrown into the arms of Newcastle'.¹⁵⁶

Factors influencing Protestant allegiance

By no means all the gentry, whether Protestant or Catholic, were enthusiastic participants in the conflict. There were strong moves to avert war and, when it came, to avoid taking sides. Some sought to stay out of the conflict altogether, and Morrill has written that as the antagonism between the King and Parliament deepened there was a common desire to remain neutral, and an awareness of the economic disaster that war would bring.¹⁵⁷ In both Staffordshire and Derbyshire there was a widespread wish to keep out of the war. According to Pickles, many of the Staffordshire gentry were not ready to commit themselves before the winter of 1642. In the early months of the war, future Parliamentarians and Royalists continued to meet at Quarter Sessions, and as late as November 1642 were to be found summoning special sessions to deal with riotous assemblies.¹⁵⁸ Charles's decision to march from York to Shrewsbury, gathering recruits on the journey, singularly failed to rouse the county at Uttoxeter, where the gentry pledged a dual loyalty to King and Parliament. Lichfield refused to send the King men and arms. Even after Edgehill, and Charles's pledge to defend the Protestant cause in a speech at Wellington, a specially convened sessions of the peace in Staffordshire issued a declaration against the activities of both sides in neighbouring counties, warning them to keep out of the county.¹⁵⁹ According to Lyn Beats, political polarisation in Derbyshire was also slow to develop until the claims of the Commission of Array and the Militia Ordinance caused rifts in the unity of the

¹⁵⁶ Meredith, 'A Derbyshire Family', p.18.

¹⁵⁷ J.Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces* (Oxford, 1999).

¹⁵⁸ J.T.Pickles, 'Studies in Royalism, ch.2; S.R.O., Q/SR 15 Nov. 1642, f1.

¹⁵⁹ For Charles's speech at Wellington, see Macray (ed.), *The History of the Rebellion*, vol.ii, p.312.

county. Even as late as December, however, a number of influential Derbyshire gentry were still undecided.¹⁶⁰

There were certainly clerics and laymen from the diocese, driven by religious or political ideals, who were enthusiastic or convinced participants in the conflict.¹⁶¹ Others who fought were more influenced by the desire to maintain the traditional social order. Pickles contends that some of those who supported Charles may have been his opponents in the early days of the Long Parliament. A respect for law and constitutional processes, and an unwillingness to dispense with bishops combined with resentment at the misuse of Parliamentary powers, may have driven them towards the King. Sir Thomas Holte of Aston and Thomas Shuckborough of Over-Shuckborough (his son-in-law) and Sir Walter Wrottesley of Wolverhampton all eventually supported Charles.¹⁶² All were moderate Puritans. Holte was patron of the living at Aston, where, from 1621, he had installed a Puritan vicar, John Grent. Aware of the danger of local popular support for Parliament, he was probably influential in Sir John Shuckborough's choice of allegiance. Shuckborough, a convinced Calvinist, had entered the Long Parliament in a by-election. Zealous to implement anti-papist measures in Warwickshire to the full, he became disaffected from Parliament, joining the King's side, with his father-in-law, at the end of 1642. Sir Walter Wrottesley of Wolverhampton had sought to keep his county out of the conflict. Persuaded by the King to throw in his lot with him, his change of course nevertheless 'seemed much to trouble him in that he feared his arms should be made use of to fight against Parliament for whose happy proceedings he so much prayed'.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ L.Beats, 'Politics and Government in Derbyshire, 1640-1660', University of Sheffield Ph.D. thesis (1978).

¹⁶¹ See above.

¹⁶² Pickles, 'Studies in Royalism', p.22; Hughes, *Politics Society and Civil War*, pp.167,128; Morrill, *Revolt of the Provinces*, pp.31,32; 70-71. Sir Thomas Holte was among those who brought Cheshire's grievances to Parliament, but by the middle of 1641 'he had become disgusted and alienated by the social and economic radicalism of the Cheshire puritans'.

¹⁶³ *VCH, Warwickshire*, vol.vii, p.270; Hughes, *Politics in Warwickshire*, pp.128-29, 157; SRO D 948/4/6/2; Pickles, 'Studies in Royalism', p.74.

Others were influenced by more pragmatic factors, such as harassment from one side or the other. When Charles passed through Derbyshire in mid-September 1642, the homes of Sir John Gell, Sir Thomas Burdett, Sir George Gresley and Sir Samuel Sleigh were plundered. The behaviour of royalist troops was a powerful incentive for some to align with Parliament, and it was the dissolution of law and order that was largely responsible for the polarisation of the parties in the county.¹⁶⁴ Despite this, some Derbyshire gentry, who remained keen to maintain a neutralist position, invited representatives of Sir John Gell to meet at Etwall. Sir George Gresley, Lt. Col. Thomas Gell, Nathaniel Hallowses, M.P. and Major Thomas Saunders (described by a contemporary as a 'very godly and an honest country gentleman') represented Gell. At the meeting, they 'quickly perceived that nothing would suit the designs of the malignants, but the dissolving of our forces, [so] wee resolved to keep together'. Their grasp of the situation was religious; that of their neutralist peers pragmatic.¹⁶⁵ The understanding that Royalist troops were ill-disciplined was not confined to Derbyshire alone. Brooke played on such fears in his speech to his officers at Warwick, and *A True Relation of the King's Coming to Shrewsbury* of 1642 reported the apparent unpopularity of the billeted troops in the town, who unpaid and uncertain of the continuity of supplies, plundered the local population.¹⁶⁶ According to Andy Wood, amongst Derbyshire leadminers Civil War partisanship was a negative reaction reflecting antagonism towards local landowners. High Peak miners tended to support the King, reflecting their antipathy to Sir John Gell, conversely those at Wirksworth may have given him their support out of hostility to the crown.¹⁶⁷ In Staffordshire, 'it was the determined incursions of outsiders, notably from

¹⁶⁴ Beats, 'Politics in Derbyshire'; *England's Memorable Accidents*, Sept. 12-19, 1642.

¹⁶⁵ Glover, *Derby* vol. 1, Appendix 68, Account by Sir George Gresley.

¹⁶⁶ Greville, *A Worthy Speech*; p.n.; *A True Relation of the King's Coming to Shrewsbury* (London, Sept. 29, 1642); Beaumont, 'Events in Shropshire', *T.S.A.S.*; Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, p. 43.

¹⁶⁷ A. Wood, *The Politics of Social Conflict, the Peak Country 1520-1770* (Oxford, 1999), p. 272.

Shropshire, and a rising of the Moorlanders against new fiscal and economic hardships, which toppled the majority into the royalist camp'.¹⁶⁸

Such alignments could result in problems of conscience. Jonathan Langley, a mayor of Shrewsbury after the Restoration, fled from the Shropshire Royalists to Birmingham. Believing that the Protestation bound him to both sides, he complained that, 'there are two armies each seeking to destroy one another and by oath bound to preserve both, each challenging the Protestant religion for their standard, yet one takes the papists and the other the schismatics for their adherents and for my part, my conscience tells me they both intend the Protestant religion. What reason have I to fall out with either'?¹⁶⁹

Religion played a vital part in motivating the religiously committed to take up arms. However, amongst many at all social levels, it may have provided a negative, rather than positive motivation. Even Richard Baxter, who found the constitutional arguments of both sides hard to untangle, was swayed his 'judgment in the Matter of the Wars' by news of the Irish 'massacre', and the 'real danger' posed by it to Parliament's 'endeavours for reformation'.¹⁷⁰ On the Royalist side, there was a popular antipathy to 'Puritanism', which was linked with disloyalty to the King. The Puritan, Mellor, curate at Teddington, Derbyshire, was not alone in being suspected of favouring Parliament. At Eaton Constantine, Baxter's apolitical father 'and all his Neighbours that were noted for praying and hearing Sermons, were plundered by the King's soldiers, so that some of them had almost nothing but Lumber left in their Houses'.¹⁷¹ Royalists also feared a parliamentary root and branch reformation of the Church, which the Staffordshire petition feared could not 'recompence with any proportionable utility, the disturbances and disorders which it may worke by novelty', and the ensuing persecution of its faithful adherents.¹⁷² Sometimes, protests were inspired as much by political as

¹⁶⁸ Morrill, *Revolt of the Provinces*, p.55.

¹⁶⁹ *T.S.A.S.*, vii (1895), pp.263-4; Morrill, *Revolt*, p.164.

¹⁷⁰ Sylvester (ed.), *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, p.39.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.44-5.

¹⁷² Aston, *Petitions*, pp.25-26; see above, pp.304-305.

religious motives. The Parliamentary proscription of the Book of Common Prayer and altars and rails turned their continued use into a political statement. Isaac Martin, incumbent of Great Bolas, continued to use the Prayer Book, and John Hill turned the communion table altarwise. Neither of them had been model Laudian clerics.¹⁷³

Conclusion

Religion shaped perceptions of the ecclesiastical and political situation for both future Parliamentarians and Royalists in the diocese. Even some Catholics, whose faith might have precluded them from participation in the conflict, were influenced in their allegiance by reasoning that life would be even less comfortable under a Puritan regime than it had been under the King. On the Parliamentary side, many adhered to a proselytising and experimental Calvinism, which provided the moral imperative for their war against the Malignants, both Popish and Laudian, and convinced them of the need to purify the Church. The support of members of the clergy for the King or Parliament was an important feature of the struggle; their influence within the parish, and sometimes further afield, was recognised as significant by the opposite party who often persecuted “malignant” clergy.

Anti-Catholicism, almost universal amongst English Protestants, was vital to the Parliamentary side for whom it became part of the religious justification of the War. This can be clearly seen within the diocese in the preaching of influential Puritan clergy, in the comments of the leading gentry and in the pro-reform petitions of 1642. Zealous adherents of the parliamentary cause went to war inspired by sermons and speeches to destroy Catholicism, and, where local animosities existed, they were raised out of the particular to the universal, dignified as being part of the age-long struggle of Christ and anti-Christ.

¹⁷³ Matthews, *Walker Revised*, p.306

Despite this, the evidence does not fully support Morrill's contention that the Civil War was the last of the Wars of Religion. Amongst the Parliamentarians many were fired with crusading zeal to extinguish Catholicism and reform the Church, but the Royalist response, despite the affection in which the Church was held, was less single-minded and inspired by a greater diversity of motives in which religion sometimes played a negative role. For instance, the Catholics took a more prominent role than their numbers would suggest. In many cases they were probably driven more by fear of Parliament than enthusiasm for the King; unlike some of their Puritan adversaries they were aware that his was not the Catholic cause. On both sides there were some whose primary motivation for fighting was not religious, as well as some of firm religious convictions but divided loyalties who would have preferred to remain neutral.

What was the contribution of Laudianism to the conflict? The respect for the established Church had been seriously weakened by the Laudian hegemony, and the Church's essential nature after its demise, reformed or sacramental, was still unclear. In the 1630s, Arminianism had brought division and alienated a significant and influential number of Church members. After its collapse, it equipped its enemies with a powerful propaganda weapon. Its perceived crypto-Catholicism and the support it received from the King were crucial factors in the breakdown of trust between reforming parliamentarians and the Monarch. Its legacy, nationally and locally, was to weaken the Royalists' Protestant credentials, and to provide their opponents with a foe whose apparent defeat spurred them on in their crusade to eradicate the remaining vestiges of Catholicism, and fully reform the Church.

Conclusion

In 1603 the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield was noted for its lack of preachers, and for pockets of Catholicism which had proved resistant to the claims of the Reformation. Although Catholics were not so numerous or concentrated as in west Lancashire, reformers in the midland diocese were less privileged than those in the neighbouring see of Chester. Protestant ministers in Coventry and Lichfield had not been given a similar official liberty in which to proselytise and, as a consequence, the area had less of a Puritan 'tradition'. Bishop Overton's early attempt to promote a scheme for the provision of a godly ministry met with official disapproval. Despite this, he continued to encourage Puritan preaching during his long episcopate (1580-1609), even allowing some preachers who had been disciplined elsewhere to continue their ministries in his diocese.

Chapter Two, surveying the episcopal leadership, showed that the experience of this diocese did not match Nicholas Tyacke's model of a sixty year Calvinist consensus, unbroken until the mid 1620s. Richard Neile (1610-1614) and John Overall (1614-1618) were in the vanguard of those Arminian bishops who only achieved unequivocal official sanction with the accession of Charles. Moreover, the later episcopate of Thomas Morton (1619-1632), pastoral, evangelistic, reformed and anti-Catholic, appears somewhat 'old-fashioned' in the light of the developments of the 1620s and 1630s. Morton's churchmanship was similar to that of Archbishop Abbot (1611-1633), whose brief episcopate in the diocese (in 1609) ended with his translation to London. Abbot's sympathies were more Calvinistic and perhaps less ecumenical than those of James I, but there were fewer causes of friction between them than Abbot later experienced with

Charles I and the Arminian party.¹ James held bishops in greater regard than his predecessor. Abbot and his three successors were highly esteemed by the King; the relative obscurity and provincial bickerings of Overton were in sharp contrast to the four luminaries who succeeded him.

Patrick Collinson and Kenneth Fincham have viewed bishops who espoused a Calvinistic evangelicalism as generally adopting a more pastoral approach than those of an Arminian persuasion who saw themselves primarily as custodians of order. The history of Coventry and Lichfield broadly confirms this view. The 'proto-Arminians', Neile and Overall were committed to the maintenance of obedience and uniformity.² Despite their short episcopates, there is evidence that both court bishops were effective. Neile was an able custodian of order, and his handling of the 1611 Wightman trial reveals his skill in maintaining the authority of the church against heretics and non-conformists alike. Information with regard to the episcopate of Overall is sparser, but is nevertheless indicative of its local effectiveness. Both men used visitation articles to press conformity and, despite their position at Court, were present at their episcopal visitations (1611, 1614, 1617), making efficient use of the diocesan hierarchy in the pursuit of their goals. A testimony to Overall's ability is found in a comment

¹ K.Fincham and P. Lake, 'The Ecclesiastical Policies of James I and Charles I' in Fincham (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642* (Basingstoke, 1993), pp.31-32.

² Nevertheless, they would have maintained that within the Arminian programme of reform, commitment to order and uniformity did not preclude pastoral sensitivity. Laud claimed that he strove for the unity and peace of the Church, and Julian Davies has examples of his pastoral gentleness. For instance, in Laud's dealings with the Puritan cleric Arthur Jackson, who had refused to read the King's declaration for lawful sports, the Archbishop commanded that because Jackson 'is a quiet and peaceable man ... I will not have him meddled with'. Neile, as Archbishop of York, claimed that he had deprived no-one. The image of a bishop gently leading his flock was one to which all bishops subscribed. Their practice sometimes fell far short. See, for example, Laud's attitude to Herring of Shrewsbury, Lee of Wolverhampton, and his support for Needham against Corbet at Adderley. According to Foster, the Arminian attitude after 1629 was to seek revenge on their enemies. Neile's regime at York was 'the iron hand in the velvet glove'. In his time at Lichfield he had suspended Hildersham; at York, Smart, the prebendary who had protested against the Durham altar, was stripped from office by Neile, and he was degraded and imprisoned until 1632. During 1632-1640, 115 ministers came before the church courts at York, fifty-five of whom appeared before the chancery court. K.Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (Yale, 1992), p.287; J.Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church* (Oxford, 1992), p.204; Chapters 5,6,8,2 pp.196,225-226,,286-287,56-57; A Foster, 'Church policies of the 1630s', in A. Hughes and R.Cust (eds.), *Conflict in the Early Stuart Church*, pp.193-223.

made by Richard Baddeley, Morton's legal secretary. Baddeley declared that his master did not face as many problems as he had encountered in his previous diocese of Chester, 'because the common sort of people for the most part were better principled by the care and vigilancy of his predecessor'.³

Morton's preoccupations were more pastoral, more concerned with the promulgation of the gospel than the regulation of preaching and worship. He gained a reputation for hospitality and charity and busied himself in preaching, catechising and polemical studies, taking great care over the appointment of his chaplains. Eager to promote preaching, he preferred to examine ordinands himself, not 'trusting his own chaplains in this sacred business'. To one of his biographers, he was a 'transcript' of a Pauline bishop, 'so lively resembling and representing the original'.⁴ However, endeavouring to maintain a more accessible pastoral oversight proved not unproblematic. Anthony Milton's observation that all religious groups were prone to change in the early Stuart period includes the occupants of the episcopal bench. Collegiality amongst bishops ensured that Morton was on terms of personal friendship and equality with men with whom he differed theologically, and could be influenced by them. As Collinson has observed, the initial 'Puritanism of Morton, Bedell and Hall was broadened and mollified through patristic learning combined with the influence of aristocratic patrons, contact with Roman Catholics and preferment'.⁵ Morton's 'puritanism' was constrained by a belief in the apostolic nature of the established church, and a *iure divino* episcopate. He was persuaded that schism from the church was a far greater sin than the tendency amongst some non-conformists to baulk at participating in parish worship over issues that the Bishop regarded as 'things indifferent'. The publication of *A Defence of the Innocency of the three Ceremonies of the Church of England* showed his 'unswerving support for

³ J.Barwick, *IEPONIKHE*, (1660),p.88.

⁴ R. Baddeley and J. Naylor, *The Life of Dr. Thomas Morton, late Bishop of Duresme* (York, 1669), p.172.

⁵ P.Collinson, *Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982),p.84.

ceremonial conformity'.⁶ Some of his later appointments at Durham sought to foster links between Calvinists and Arminians, a compromise which, because of the pressures placed on him by the Crown and both Archbishops, probably leaned further towards the Arminians than he would have wished.⁷ Milton has remarked that the doctrinal ties which bound Laud to his associates were more significant than those which united moderate Puritans to evangelical bishops.⁸ Despite such pressure, the Bishop still maintained his encouragement and patronage of reformed preachers.

The conflicting doctrinal pressures with which Morton had to contend help to explain the apparent contradictions of some of his decisions at Coventry and Lichfield. Negotiating a pastoral course between upholding the order of the established church and a concern to provide a godly preaching ministry from patently gifted men who opposed some aspects of its liturgy cannot have been easy- especially in an atmosphere of doctrinal change. Despite such changes, and perhaps some personal compromises, Morton sought to continue his role as a preaching pastor of his dioceses in an increasingly hostile environment.

Attempting to reconcile the Arminian concepts of discipline and uniformity with pastoral care could prove even more difficult. Wright's theological leanings would seem to place him as a custodian of order, but at times he displayed a pastoral openness which drew on him the disapproval of some of his diocesan officers. Studley (admittedly a partisan source) commented on the gentleness of his approach when preaching to secure conformity at a Visitation at Shrewsbury in the mid 1630s.⁹ His pragmatic attitude to problems and his apparent accessibility give the impression that he attempted to keep a foot in both camps, and pursued an 'accommodating Arminian' approach. In an increasingly tense situation this ran the risk of offending anti-Laudians and doctrinaire

⁶ K. Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 259-60.

⁷ M. Tillbrook, 'Arminianism and Society in County Durham, 1617-1642', in D. Marcombe (ed.), *The Last Principality* (Loughborough, 1987), pp.210-212,214.

⁸ A. Milton, *Catholic and Reformed* (Cambridge, 1995), p.543.

⁹ P. Studley, *The Lookinge-glasse of Schisme* (London, 1635), p.286.

Laudians alike. The relative openness of his pastoral dealings points to the limitations inherent in too rigid an application of Fincham's 'preaching pastor/custodian of order' models of episcopal practice, and suggests that something more nuanced is required. Compared to such bishops as Neile, Piers or Dee of Peterborough, Wright was less willing or less able to direct the programme of reform within the diocese, and the initiative passed to subordinates. Whatever the origin of the innovations and the increased imposition of liturgical uniformity, however, the effect was the same. They drew down on the hierarchy the animosity and opposition of an increasingly alienated section of the church.

To function efficiently, every bishop was dependent on capable assistants. The history of the diocese shows how some bishops were able to bring like-minded subordinates with them, but also shows some of the problems that every bishop faced in trying to build up an effective and sympathetic team. Neile was attended by a selected band of able deputies, adding Thomas Masters, his former Chancellor at Rochester, to this group in 1613. Neile had brought William Easdell, his legal secretary, with him, and on his translation to Lincoln, Easdell moved with his master. As Fincham has shown, legal secretaries gave bishops a measure of independence from their diocesan registrars. Easdell proved a long-serving and trusted member of Neile's entourage, and Richard Baddeley held a similar position under Morton. John Cosin, a future bishop, was legal secretary to Overall. There were, however, obstacles to the development of a team of like-minded associates. Positions usually became vacant only through death or promotion, and not all were in the gift of the bishop. In 1628 Laud had given the deanery of Lichfield to Augustine Lindsell, described by an opponent as 'a profest disciple of that Arch-heretic and enemy of God, Arminius, and ring leader of that cursed sect in England'. Such political appointments could be used to prevent the establishment of a team of like-minded deputies. Lindsell's appointment countered Morton's influence in his Cathedral Church, effectively undercutting his authority and influence, and advanced the career of a divine 'committed to the

Laudian vision of further reformation'.¹⁰ Until 1641, almost all of the diocesan hierarchy whose livings were in Wright's gift had been appointed before he became bishop.

Chapter Three, a study of Puritanism in the diocese, found that the 'hotter sort of Protestants' differed from their co-religionists in degree rather than in kind. They can be found, amongst both clergy and laity, along a spectrum from 'painful conformists' to partial conformists and non-conformists on the brink of secession. The *comperta* document the non-conformity of a minority; other kinds of evidence suggest that the majority of painful religionists conformed. Most of the diocese had little of a Puritan tradition, with the obvious and important exception of Coventry and some other parts of North Warwickshire, and Shrewsbury. There were few parishes with a consistent Puritan connection dating from the early years of Elizabeth's reign, in contrast, for example, to parts of the diocese of Chester and to Essex.¹¹ Even in places where a reformed ministry was of some longevity its success could be undermined by local opposition and/or unsympathetic patronage, as at Southam. The limited evidence we have suggests that, in comparison to the northern diocese, the deficiency may have caused both a greater sense of insecurity and a lack of confidence. There appears to have been a less consistent pattern of liturgical non-conformity amongst the individual members of the laity (i.e., fewer examples of the same persons being presented for the same offence). In his study of Chester diocese, Richardson found that the role of the clergy seemed to decline as Puritanism consolidated itself.¹² This characteristic was not so apparent in Coventry and Lichfield, where there were fewer

¹⁰ See Chapter 2, p. 37, PRO, SP 16/113/19; N.Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists* (Oxford, 1987), p.127. Kenneth Fincham has recently maintained that after his entry into the Signet Office in March 1628, Laud played a pre-eminent role in the distribution of crown patronage of royal chaplaincies, benefices, deaneries and bishoprics, based on Charles's 'unswerving support and trust in him'. K.Fincham, 'William Laud and the Exercise of Ecclesiastical Patronage', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51, no.1 (2000), pp.69-93. Tillbrook, 'Arminianism and Society in Durham, 1617-1642', p.203.

¹¹ Essex had a history of radical Protestantism even before Mary's reign, a powerful Puritan magnate in the Earl of Warwick, who owned twenty-two advowsons, and a relative abundance of painful preachers. W. Hunt, *The Puritan Moment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp.87-112.

¹² R.C.Richardson, *Puritanism in north-west England* (Manchester, 1972), ch.3.

presentments for conventicling, and fewer examples of laymen seizing the religious initiative.

The Laudian ecclesiastical policies adopted by Charles I from his accession tightened the previously latitudinarian attitude to worship generally prevalent in James's reign. Bishop Robert Wright was in sympathy with these reforms, and under his episcopate some lectures were suppressed and others regulated, and liturgical conformity increasingly enforced. There was a drive to end gadding and reassert clerical rather than lay patronage, in an attempt to reduce Puritans to obedient acquiescence. These changes had a considerable impact, which is evidenced by an increase in presentments for non-conformity.

The Arminian clamp-down made life more difficult for Puritans but, despite this, they proved resilient and may have experienced a modest increase in numbers. Although unofficial fasts and some lectures were proscribed, the popularity of such meetings did not wane. Ball, Bourne and Smart all ministered at unofficial fast days. Lectures, such as the one at Birmingham, remained popular with the godly, and gadding was more widespread in the 1630s. Puritanism may not have been as prevalent as in Essex, but there is little to suggest that it was so thinly spread that such structures became ineffective as a means of holding the community together. Local Puritan communities tended to be established in areas where there was a vigorous reformed ministry, and strengthened by a culture which emphasised individual and corporate commitment to the 'means of grace'. Where such communities existed, they were no harder hit in Coventry and Lichfield than elsewhere in the country. Furthermore, Laudianism was possibly too short-lived to do significant damage to the godly cause in the diocese, and almost certainly strengthened local Puritans in their convictions.

The reasons for Puritan survival could vary from place to place. At Coventry, the city's Puritan tradition was strong enough to endure Buggs and the Laudian assault of the 1630s. Birmingham's Puritanism, with less deep roots, appears to

have thrived from the 1620s, when lectures were set up in the town. They continued into the next decade, and preachers such as Burges, Grent and Atkins met with the approval of a godly fraternity which included such Puritans as Thomas Hall and Thomas Dugard. Even under the Laudians, a Puritan ministry flourished at St. Martin's, under Josiah Slader and Francis Roberts, and at nearby Aston, under John Grent. By the Civil War, Birmingham was a resolutely parliamentary town, described as 'pestilent and seditious' by *Mercurius Aulicus*. Coventry was won for Parliament by 'many sectaries and schismatics who flocked unto them ... especially from that populous town of Birmingham. Baxter saw things differently: the Coventry garrison contained the 'most religious men of the parts round about ... men of great soundness and sobriety in understanding as any garrison in England'.¹³ Birmingham is an example of a local Puritan community which grew in size and commitment despite the difficult religious climate of the 1630s. At Wombourne, Ithiel Smart maintained his ministry by selective obedience to the Church authorities, (he was brought before High Commission for holding an unauthorised Fast Day), allowing visiting Puritan ministers the use of his pulpit, in spite of official disapproval, and bolstering his ministry by having his Emmanuel-trained nephews, Nathaniel and then Ezekiel, as curates.

Chapter Four has shown that Catholicism was found amongst all social classes, with numbers varying considerably in different parts of the diocese. Concentrations of recusancy can usually be linked to support among the Catholic gentry, whose households, as John Bossy found, were centres of the Faith, and 'buttresses of Catholicism in their neighbourhoods'.¹⁴ Haigh's contention that, by the 1630s, seigneurial Catholicism had reduced the Catholic Church to 'a tiny introspective group, its missionaries unable to sustain and strengthen existing

¹³ Birmingham Central Reference Library, MS 1098/119; V.C.H., *Warwickshire*, vii, pp. 270,411; A.Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.74-75,81; M.Sylvester (ed.), *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London, 1696), p.45.

¹⁴ J.Bossy, 'The Character of Elizabethan Catholicism', *Past and Present*, 21 (1962), pp.39-59; K.J.Lindley, 'The Lay Catholics of England in the Reign of Charles I', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. xxii, no.3, July 1971, p.206.

Catholic loyalties', with some areas and groups lost to the faith, is unsustainable for this diocese.¹⁵ A comparison of recusancy returns with those of previous decades and *comperta*, shows, if anything, an increase in the number of offenders. These are hardly the signs of the collapse of Catholicism; rather, they signify its vibrancy and resilience, and a growing confidence and belligerence within this community. Evidence has also been found of the reluctant semi-conformity of Church Papists, the subject of a recent study by Alexandra Walsham.¹⁶ It is sometimes argued that they were gradually absorbed amongst parish conformists, but the *comperta* of the 1630s show no diminution in Church Papist presentments, thus inferring that Laudian reforms were insufficient to secure a change in their religious allegiance.¹⁷ Evidence from Coventry and Lichfield suggests that Church Papists remained a clearly identifiable, if flexible, group, whose composition varied in response to local and national circumstances.

Chapter Five, on the episcopate of Robert Wright (1632-1643), an Arminian, demonstrated how he sought to implement the royal injunctions with regard to preaching. Altars were railed and repositioned, and there was a greater emphasis upon sacramentalism and upon clerical and lay conformity in worship. Wright was less doctrinaire and more pragmatic than some of his officials, however, and his more enthusiastic subordinates were dissatisfied with his lack of zeal for the Laudian cause. Wright's episcopate also shows some of the problems facing Laud and the King. Though broadly sympathetic to their ideals, he lacked Laud's energy and drive, and was reluctant to stir up divisions within his diocese. Unwilling to act, and equally unwilling to reveal his inactivity to the King, he

¹⁵ C. Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics and the People', in Haigh (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Basingstoke, 1984), pp.195-219.

¹⁶ A. Walsham, *Church Papists* (Woodbridge, 1993).

¹⁷ See *idem*, 'The Parochial Roots of Laudianism Revisited', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 49:4 (1998), pp.642-646. Walsham maintains that it is difficult to gauge the success of attempts in the 1630s to allure recusants and church papists into the Protestant fold. She cites the example of Mrs. Dorothy Lawson, a northern Catholic matriarch who had 'nothing but contempt for the ritual and ceremonial modifications' under Laud. A number of other examples she uses are of resistance to the changes by the educated. Levels of Church Papism in Coventry and Lichfield remained fairly constant in the 1620s and 1630s. See Chapter 4.

sought to escape attention by failing to send in the annual reports on the state of the diocese which the King demanded.

Wright's relatively moderate stance becomes even more apparent when his episcopate is compared with that of William Piers of Bath and Wells. Stieg has written that 'fullest co-operation could be expected from Piers' surrogates'. Like Neile, he had gathered around him a group of trustworthy lieutenants. This was not the case with Wright, who had inherited a number of church officers from his predecessor, and was less focused in his pursuit of reform. Piers did not allow catechetical preaching, believed that the necessity for preaching had been confined to the Apostolic age, and by 1637 had suppressed all afternoon sermons and lectures within his charge. Wright, in comparison, allowed a greater authority and latitude to preachers within his diocese. Despite the stipulations about the regulation of preaching in his visitation articles of 1633, he was not averse to catechetical preaching and defended his fifty-eight year record of painful preaching when he was brought before Parliament in 1641. Piers, within the parameters provided by the Book of Sports, was a strict sabbatarian. Wright was probably the least sabbatarian bishop on the bench, courting local popularity by allowing practical requirements and pleasurable pursuits to override the stipulations of the 'King's Book'.¹⁸ Over the imposition of altars, Piers lobbied Charles for the introduction of the rail and the altarwise position of the table, introducing diocesan alterations in 1633. The new regulations were also introduced early at Coventry and Lichfield, but Piers' attitude to these changes was far more dogmatic than Wright's. The hard-line approach that Piers adopted

¹⁸ According to Julian Davies, it is impossible to categorise sabbatarian opinion along Calvinist/Arminian lines. He cites Launcelot Andrewes and John Cosin as 'sabbatarians of an unequivocally strict complexion', and John Prideaux and Joseph Hall as examples of Calvinists who were opposed to a legalistic attitude to the sabbath. J.Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church* (Oxford, 1992), pp.203-4; K.L.Parker, *The English Sabbath* (Cambridge, 1992), *passim*.

in the parish of Beckington contrasted markedly with the pragmatism Wright displayed at Coventry.¹⁹

The Sixth chapter offered a case study, outlining the attempt to bring Puritanism to Wolverhampton. Unlike some other towns, such as Doncaster or even Shrewsbury, Wolverhampton did not have a Puritan 'heritage'. Previously noted as a centre of recusancy, the installation of Richard Lee, the Puritan preacher, in the early 1620s, appears to have been largely an initiative from outside the community, on the part of Joseph Hall and some London merchants. Lee was suspended at the Metropolitan Visitation of 1635 when the Laudians were imposing their innovations on the community. Distaste for Laudian sacramentalism, as the Wolverhampton examples show, ran far deeper than a dislike of ecclesiastical alterations of 'things indifferent'. The local resistance to these changes, which were seen as an attack on the reformed faith, revealed their unpopularity, and supports Tyacke's claim that such reforms were inimical to many Puritans, and provoked a strong reaction. Perceived as crypto-Catholic, the new sacramentalism and uniformity ran counter to the word-based Calvinism of Lee. Laudian and Calvinist church practices clashed, the outer manifestations of very different theologies; this suggests, for example, that Darren Oldridge's claim that the central issue in the controversy of the 1630s was not predestinarian theology but the concept of the Church attempts to separate the inseparable.²⁰

Chapter seven, which examined the evidence for clerical and lay Arminianism, found a small group of diocesan officials, local clergy and some lay-folk who espoused a more sacramental religion. Though pursuing very different goals from the Puritans, they manifested a similar crusading spirit, and harnessed the church courts to enforce their programme. There was a general lack of consistency in the local application of the Laudianism. While the altar policy appears to have been widely executed, Wright's latitudinarian oversight impeded

¹⁹ M.Stieg, *Laud's Laboratory* (East Brunswick, 1982), p.283 and ch. 10, *passim*; see above, chapter 5.

²⁰ D.Oldridge, *Religion and Society in Early Stuart England* (Aldershot, 1998), p.33.

a uniform programme of reform, and the initiative for its implementation was left to the commitment and zeal of individuals. The reforms proved divisive, alienating not only Puritan non-conformists, but a significant minority who later petitioned Parliament for the retention of episcopacy and the prayer book, free from the innovations of the Laudian period.²¹ With the collapse of the Personal Rule, the ecclesiastical careers of the innovators foundered.

What can we know of the religion of the conforming masses? Much of the church court material is concerned with proper religious provision, and does not provide information of a theological nature. Evidence from the 1630s to support Maltby's claim that there was a substantial group who venerated the Prayer Book, had imbibed its theology, and were committed Protestants, is not readily apparent. Parishioners were concerned that the minister was performing his duties satisfactorily, and when he was negligent they often showed their disapproval by reporting him to the church courts. Holding a parish-based inclusivist religion, in contrast to the elect Church-within-the-church of the godly, parishioners believed they had a right to the rites of the church which were to be performed by an ordained minister. On such occasions the Prayer Book appears to have been accepted as authoritative. Richard Kilby wrote that in Derby, in 1614, baptism was not regarded as being 'perfectly done without the sign of the cross'.²²

The church court records show that parishioners expected their clergy to perform their duties competently and set a moral example to the community. They indicate a popular concern for decency and good order, but do not reveal much more than this. Perhaps there was a growing respect for the Protestantism enshrined in the Prayer Book, but even presentments for clerical non-conformity may indicate as much, if not more, of the presenters' anti-Puritanism as their respect for the liturgy. Certainly the petitions of 1640-2 sought to reclaim episcopacy and Common Prayer from the taint of Laudianism, but may have been

²¹ See chapter 8.

²² R. Kilby, *Hallelu-iah, Praise Yee the Lord for the unburthening of a laden conscience* (Cambridge, 1618), pp. 120-1.

inspired by the attack on the Church of England which, Maltby acknowledges, 'created a sense of group identity amongst conformists which was lacking before'.²² They do show an ability to distinguish between episcopacy and the occupants of individual sees.²³ Doubtless, this was present amongst congregations of the 1630s and earlier, but it is not immediately apparent from the records, and 'reading back' into them later attitudes may, in this case, tend to serious distortion. Haigh's claim that his Parish Anglicans formed the bedrock of parochial acceptance of Laudian reforms- some of which had initially been formulated partly in response to parochial discontent with the Puritan ministry- seems even more resistant to verification.²⁴

The final chapter documented the collapse of Laudianism, and then analysed religious loyalty as a determining factor of political affiliation in the early 1640s. The Puritans' allegiance to Parliament was not always a foregone conclusion, as is often assumed. By contrast, adherence to the King's cause among some Catholics was remarkably fervent, despite Caroline Catholic policy. The chapter also looked at the use of ecclesiastical resources as a means to influence the political stance of laymen. Printed religious propaganda played an important role in confirming the political affiliation of those whose minds had already been made up. In the parishes, the authority and influence of the clergy was acknowledged

²² J. Maltby, *Prayer Book and People* (Cambridge, 1998).

²³ Marchant found that in the diocese of York there remained persons of authority within the church who retained the beliefs of the Elizabethan prelate, who had married reformed theology to a tradition of ecclesiastical order, which had not been obliterated by the rise of the Arminian party. He refers to such people as Royalist Puritans, and cites Archbishop Ussher and Bishop Morton as examples. See R.A. Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York, 1560-1642* (London, 1960), p.205. Maltby claims that such beliefs were also not uncommon amongst the parochial laity.

²⁴ Christopher Haigh has recently maintained that the unpopularity of Puritan religion, pastoral consequences of the doctrine of election, and parochial demands for more ceremony, justified as a preference for prayer rather than preaching, led some ministers to 'adopt new ways', including a proto-Arminian doctrine of justification and more ceremony in services. The Calvinist Reformation was 'contained and domesticated by consumer resistance as much as by conformist bishops and Arminianising theologians'. C.Haigh, 'The Taming of the Reformation: Preachers, Pastors and Parishioners in Elizabethan and early Stuart England', *History*, 85:200 (2000), pp.572-588. With regard to Haigh's parish Anglicans, Walsham questions whether they really were 'the descendants of cradle Catholics who had sullenly conformed with the 1559 settlement and carefully nurtured their children and grandchildren in nostalgia for the mediaeval church'? Walsham, 'Parochial Roots of Laudianism', pp.635-36.

by both sides, who endeavoured to silence clerical opposition. Francis Holyoake was very successful at Southam in using his position to influence his parishioners to support the King, as Nehemiah Wharton, the parliamentary soldier, discovered. Burges of Sutton Coldfield, Vines of Weddington and Bourne of Wombourne, for Parliament, and Thomas Lever of Leamington Hastings, and John Hill of Ellastone, for the King, are all examples of those who used their position to sway the allegiance of their parishes, and suffered as a consequence. It is probable that Puritans who preached in support of Parliament, and ministered to a mixed congregation of 'saints' and 'sinners', met with more opposition from their congregations than Royalist conformists experienced. Sometimes, however, the unaligned were aware of the religious issues involved, and personal allegiance was eventually decided, not through propaganda, but by pragmatic decisions, or in response to events.

This thesis has sought to investigate something of the complexity of the religious situation in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield in the early years of the seventeenth century. Tensions were always present, but were exacerbated under the Laudian hegemony. Although Laudianism collapsed in 1641, the religious situation was not resolved, and many looked for a more radical reform of the Church. In the years after the outbreak of war in 1642, episcopacy itself was swept away, and the religious tensions which had been contained within the early Stuart polity, with varying degrees of success, exploded into armed violence.

APPENDIX

Surviving *comperta* from the period 1603-1639 are as follows:

Archdeaconry of Derby

1609 (B/V/1/26), which was, presumably, part of the new Bishop's visitation of the diocese; Overton had died in the April, and Abbot was made bishop in May 1609;

1614 (B/V/1/29); the visitation at the commencement of Overall's episcopate;

1620 (B/V/1/41); the visitation at the commencement of Thomas Morton's episcopate;

1623 (B/V/1/44), under Morton;

1636 (B/V/1/59);

1639 (B/V/1/64).

Only a fraction of Derbyshire *comperta* for the period have thus survived; at least two of Overton's have disappeared, and the 1609 *comperta* are incomplete. The 'first' page of the manuscript commences with an unnamed parish, and indicates that a page, at the least, has been lost. There are no extant *comperta* from Neile's time, and the 1617 presentments arising from the second of Overall's visitations do not remain. During Morton's lengthy episcopate, the 1623 *comperta* lacks some deaneries; the Derby *comperta* are missing for 1626 and 1629.

The *comperta* for the archdeaconry of Stafford are more numerous, but remain somewhat fragmentary. There is nothing before 1614; however in that year, and later, the sources are as follows:

1614 (B/V/1/30);

1616 (B/V/1/33) the *comperta* for the metropolitan visitation held in that year;

1617 (B/V/1/34);

1620 (B/V/1/38), the first under Morton;

1623 (B/V/1/45);

1623 (B/V/1/46); this contains some 'new' presentments from B/V/1/45, and some 'duplications', in some cases with additional information.

1625 (B/V/1/47);

1629 (B/V/1/52); this is a relatively lengthy list, with some apparent duplication, and some lack of correspondence in the duplicated entries;

1633 (B/V/1/54); of the deanery of Alveston and Newcastle only;

1636 (B/V/1/61); this has entries for the four deaneries, although some pages are missing;

1639 (B/V/1/66); which has presentments for the deaneries of Tamworth and Tutbury and Lapley and Trysul only.

In comparison with the Derby *comperta*, the records for Staffordshire are fuller and more detailed for the years after 1614. Even then, however, the results of the visitation of 1626 are missing. It is probable that the records of 1629 also include some incomplete records of a later visitation, but it is uncertain as to whether these are in response to articles formulated by the bishop or the archdeacon.

For the archdeaconry of Salop the extant *comperta* are as follows:

1614 (B/V/1/29), in a folio which also contains presentments from Derbyshire and Coventry;

1620 (B/V/1/39); comprising 52 pages, it is considerably longer than 1623 (B/V/1/43), 10 pages in length, (for the deanery of Salop only). This is augmented by entries for the deanery of Newport in B/V/1/45 (also 1623) which also contains some Staffordshire presentments. There are also records of presentments from Morton's visitation of 1626 contained in B/V/1/48, to which may be added B/V/1/50, apparently from the same year, which contains a fragment of Salop *comperta* and acta, being 'a true copie of all such presentments as were exhibited in Byshops Visitacon at Salop the first September Ano Dni 1626'. There are no more Salop *comperta* until 1633, extant presentments for the archdeaconry, with the exception of 1614, being found in a cluster from 1620-1626. Under Wright's episcopate the three surviving *comperta* are: 1633 (B/V/1/53); being a record of presentments for the deanery of Salop only, made in response to the Bishop's primary visitation; 1636 (B/V/1/60) and 1639 (B/V/1/65).

Information for the Coventry archdeaconry is also sparse. There are records of presentments c. 1609-1610 (B/V/1/22), followed by those of 1614 (B/V/1/29) which occupy fourteen pages fewer than the earlier records for the archdeaconry. Other extant *comperta* are those of 1617 (B/V/1/29), 1620 (B/V/1/40), and , during Wright's episcopate, the metropolitan visitation of 1635 (B/V/1/56), and the visitations of 1636 (B/V/1/58), and 1639 (B/V/1/63) –which does not include the deanery of Stonely.

From the above it is possible to construct a table of the extant *comperta* on the diocese:

Table Two.

Archdeacons:

	<i>Stafford</i>	<i>Derby</i>	<i>Coventry</i>	<i>Salop</i>
1609-1610	-	B/V/1/26	B/V/1/22	-
1614	B/V/1/33	B/V/1/29	B/V/1/29	B/V/1/29
1616 Met Vis.	B/V/1/33	-	-	-
1617	B/V/1/34	-	-	-
1620	B/V/1/38	B/V/1/41	B/V/1/40	B/V/1/39
1623	B/V/1/45/46(?)	B/V/1/44	-	B/V/1/43/45
1623 Archd?	B/V/1/47	-	-	-
1626	-	-	-	B/V/1/48/50
1629	B/V/1/52	-	-	-
1633	B/V/1/54	-	-	B/V/1/53
1635 Met Vis.	-	-	B/V/1/56	-
1636	B/V/1/61	B/V/1/59	B/V/1/58	B/V/1/60
1639	B/V/1/66	B/V/1/64	B/V/1/63	B/V/1/65

From these *comperta* the following observations may be made:

- a) there are no surviving *comperta* from James's reign for the episcopate of William Overton;
- b) where a group of *comperta* appear to duplicate one another (for example, B/V/1/52, for Stafford, 1629), this has probably been caused by presentments from different visitations being grouped together in one folio without any indication that they originate from separate visitations;

- c) some of the *comperta* have suffered either serious deterioration over the years, or are fragments of what were once much more detailed reports (i.e., Salop, B/V/1/50, and Stafford, B/V/1/54);
- d) comparison by archdeaconry is problematic, because 1614, 1620, 1636 and 1639 are the only years in which *comperta* are extant for each of the archdeaconries.

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